

WOMEN, INVISIBILITY, AND INTIMACY:
THE TENUOUS TRIAD

A THESIS PROJECT

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Dedicated to Dr. Alice P. Mathews and
Bill and Gethin Coolbaugh
to the Glory of God

Our peace is found in our proximity to Him—whether on throne or cross or manger.

- Richard C. Langer, Biola University Center for Christianity, Culture, and the Arts

CONTENTS

Abstract	vi
Chapter	
CHAPTER 1. THE PROBLEM IN ITS SETTING	1
CHAPTER 2. BIBLICAL THEOLOGICAL ISSUES FOR WOMEN	16
CHAPTER 3. LITERATURE REVIEW	39
CHAPTER 4. THESIS - PROJECT DESIGN AND RESEARCH METHODOLOGY	51
CHAPTER 5. OUTCOMES AND CONCLUSIONS	57
Appendix	
APPENDIX A. VISIO DIVINA "WHAT CHRIST SAW FROM THE CROSS"	67
APPENDIX B. SURVEY QUESTIONNAIRES FOR VISIO DIVINA	71
APPENDIX C. SYMBOLS IMPART MEANING TO HUMANITY	73
Bibliography	79
Vita	84

ABSTRACT

This thesis presents research relating to women and their struggle with emotional and psychological invisibility due to their oppression within a patriarchal society. Such invisibility affects women's intimacy with God, within themselves, and with others. The image of God is equally present in women as in men according to the Judeo-Christian Scripture, and women are charged equally by God to "rule and subdue the earth." Since women are shaped by patriarchy within their families and church contexts (Christian women), women's struggle towards agency is often thwarted. In discovering their inner voice and learning to trust it, women can realize their instrumentality and work towards *shalom* in the world alongside men. When coordinated together as a spiritual discipline offering, sacred art along with the ancient practice of *Lectio Divina* (together termed *Visio Divina*) can be used as a mirror on a woman's soul, helping her to recognize her invisibility and sense of confined agency. This experience with *Visio Divina* as a spiritual practice can unlock women's deeper knowing of themselves, God, and others and help unleash women's greater agency so that they might join together in equality with men to both serve and lead throughout the earth.

CHAPTER 1 THE PROBLEM AND ITS SETTING

Introduction

She climbed up the three flights of ancient, creaky stairs, reflecting that the ladies' room was in an inconvenient location because it had been added long after the building was erected [Harvard University]. The school had been planned for men, and there were places, she had been told, where women were simply not permitted to go. It was odd. Why? She wondered. Women were so unimportant anyway, why would anyone bother to keep them out? She arrived in the corridor a little late. No one was left in the hallway, lingering, loitering outside classroom doors. The blank eyes, the empty faces, the young bodies that ten minutes earlier had paced its length, were gone. It was these that, passing her without seeing her, seeing her without looking at her, had driven her into hiding. For they had made her feel invisible. And when all you have is a visible surface, invisibility is death. Some deaths take forever, she found herself repeating as she walked into the classroom.¹

Women, invisibility,² and intimacy³ make for a tenuous triad. How a woman is seen, valued, and related to from birth can directly shape her capacity for mutually satisfying relationships throughout her lifetime, including her relationship with herself and God. A woman's sense of invisibility affects the depth of relational intimacy she is able to experience. Women share equally with men in the *Imago Dei* (image of God). As a result, a woman's agency on earth and in the kingdom of God is vital to taking part in "rule[ing] and subdue[ing] the earth," and partnering with Christ in accomplishing His teaching in the Lord's Prayer, "Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven." But for women in the society of the United States, there is an underlying sense of always having to prove their worth because they

¹ Marilyn French, *The Women's Room* (New York, NY: Summit Books, 1977), 9.

² "Invisibility can be defined as when one's agency is confined or defined by perception and based on incomplete truth being filtered through cultural and religious socialization." See page 9 of this present work.

³ "Intimacy is a personal knowing, a constancy in relationship based upon devotedness between the people." See page 19 of this present work.

are not convinced of their full significance and potential in life, buttressed by the cultural structure of patriarchy.

Patriarchy's Impact on Women

When the tentacles of patriarchy are wrapped around a woman's personhood, the effect touches every aspect of her life—her body, her soul, and her spirit. She feels the constriction in her ability to relate to others, to her own true self, and to God. Her sensibilities are deadened to her own potential, stifling her voice and removing from her a sense of personal agency. In the end she becomes "invisible." Due to a plethora of cultural and social influences (centuries-old patriarchy being a major component) in the world, a woman tends to be objectified or relegated to a subtle or more pronounced function of servitude, both in her role in her family and society. A woman's self-concept can often be stunted, not fully formed, as a result. Patriarchy is the underlying cause of a woman's underdeveloped self-concept.

Patriarchy remains a powerful force in today's world. Defined broadly, 'patriarchy is a social system in which the role of the male as the primary authority figure is central to social organization, and where fathers hold authority over women, children, and property. It implies the institutions of male rule and privilege, and is dependent on female subordination. Historically, the principle of patriarchy has been central to the social, legal, political, and economic organization of Hebrew, Greek, Roman, Indian, and Chinese cultures, and has had a deep influence on modern civilization.' If men must rule—whether in government, on the streets, or in private homes—then anything that threatens a man's place of authority also jeopardizes his manhood.⁴

For all humanity, people's self-concept has direct bearing on their behavior and their ability to live into their fullest potential. External and internal forces work to craft humanity's sense of themselves and what they are capable of enacting in this life and world, as well as that of the kingdom of God. When a woman's actions are expected yet treated as unseen, unvalued, or undervalued in the world, her self-concept can become one of not deserving intimacy and not

⁴ Carolyn Custis James, *Malestrom: Manhood Swept into the Currents of a Changing World* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2015), 31.

being able to receive the love for which she was created. Overcoming that obstacle often becomes the central theme of her life's work, seeking love "in all the wrong places" rather than being freed to rest in her belovedness and develop out of that a strong root of love in all the ways imbued by her Creator for the sake of God's kingdom and glory.

In a patriarchal structure, a woman is more apt to be valued socially for what she can do and how she looks, the emphasis being primarily on her productivity and external appearance on behalf of others. Her spirit, mind, and emotions can be treated as insignificant and, for a woman to survive in this culture, she may learn to ignore and bury what enlivens her being. If a woman's experience of her value to others is dictated by her social cues and outright directives, how can she learn to value and attend to what is life-giving to her own soul? The way a woman is influenced by her social environment of patriarchy shapes her emerging sense of self.

A woman comes to know of her value in a patriarchal society through her development in her family of origin

As a woman enters into the world from infancy, the home in which she is received and the human relationships within that home establish her sense of being at bedrock, laying the foundation for her concept of worth. Women born into homes with established patriarchy know only this norm in their most formative years.

Depending on the enforced degree of hierarchical behavior, a girl is imprinted strongly with the deep sense of being less than her God-given capacity by virtue of her being born female. Girls in this type of family scenario quickly learn that a woman's place is always secondary to a man's, and generally, so is a girl's to a boy's. In many such households, the women and girls are relegated to the duties of preparation and service to other family members, a girl perceiving that this is her primary purpose in life. As she watches the women in this type of a family structure, she may see that her highest goal is to marry and produce

children, adding to her broader sense of being valued, by virtue of her gender, for works of preparation and service to the family, especially to the men and children.

A woman's own sense of self in such a family unit is framed first by her understanding of hierarchy as exhibited primarily through patriarchy. Her role is imposed upon her by her family system and that designation may, and mostly does, confine her and her dreams for the possibilities of her life.⁵ "All women grow up having to deal with historically and culturally engrained definitions of femininity and womanhood—one common theme being that women, like children, should be seen and not heard."⁶ Of course, there are varying degrees of exhibited patriarchy in family structures and for some, maybe none at all!

...All forms of patriarchy are not equally bad—patriarchy is a continuum. It ranges from radicalized violent fundamentalists, such as the Taliban and ISIS (but that exist in every religion, including Christianity), to kinder, gentler versions embraced and promoted by cultural traditionalists and some western evangelicals. Despite the vast variety of expressions, the root issues of the malestrom run deeper than gender; they are about what Jesus warned us—of the original sin of self-interest, privilege, dominance, and power over others. ...patriarchy, while alluring to many, is ultimately destructive for both men and women.⁷

But while patriarchy is still deeply embedded in most major cultures, even though it may be patriarchy lite, by virtue of its name, the sense of hierarchy in the home resting with the male communicates to the soul of a girl that she is not to be seen and known for who she is, but rather for what she can do or produce to serve the family.

⁵ "'I'm not worried about men,' Val exclaimed. 'Let them worry about themselves. They've taken pretty good care of themselves for the past four thousand years. And women's problems *do* all spring from the same root: that they're women. Everything Mira's told us about her life shows it to be one long training in humiliations, and education in suppressing self.'" French, *The Women's Room*, 60.

⁶ Mary Field Belenky, Blythe McVicker Clinchy, Nancy Rule Goldberger, and Jill Mattuck Tarule *Women's Ways of Knowing: The Development of Self, Voice, and Mind* (New York, NY: Basic Books, 1997), 5.

⁷ James, *Malestrom*, 30.

Humanity continues to look for ways for self-promotion and putting one's own needs above others, for power to use and wield over the other. One way this has become manifest is through patriarchy's oppression and, even worse, having the promotion and support of whole societies, cultures, and yes, even religious institutions to promote male "self-interest, privilege, dominance, and power over others."⁸ "The prevalent features of manhood definitions are man as impregnator, protector, provider, and polar opposite of women. These are distinct characteristics of the patriarchal social system. Questions that ultimately confront every man and boy and drive his choices center on the quest for identity, meaning, purpose, and belonging. These are questions patriarchy proposes to answer."⁹ Historically and culturally, the pattern of male hierarchy has established an environment of competition between the genders because, if a woman's desire is for a man and his is ultimately for leaving his mark on the world, then the woman becomes something to use rather than someone to cherish and serve, to help flourish. Patriarchy is about domination, and domination is more about using than giving one's power away for the sake of another.

Because of the effects of patriarchalism on societies, girls/women need to first realize they have a voice (unlike a boy/man who has that presumed prerogative from birth), then learn to listen to it, and finally have courage to bring it forth in order to enact agency in this world for the good and wholeness of the world and humankind. There are many more obstacles in a patriarchal system for a girl/woman to overcome in order to be empowered by and empower others with her own agency.

⁸ James, *Malestrom*, 30.

⁹ James, *Malestrom*, 30.

A woman comes to know of her value in a patriarchal society through her specific religious setting in the church

A woman's experience of the patriarchal church model constricts her view of self and God. Unfortunately, one weighty example of women having their agency diminished has occurred throughout the ages in the context of the church. The Triune God put forth in the Christian Scripture has been almost exclusively referred to and related to as male. While the Bible teaches that God is beyond gender, translators have consistently assigned masculine pronouns to God. The implication is that God is male. That has led to the limitation of leadership to men. A woman's encounter with God through the male-only leadership model suppresses her view of God and self.

Tragically, the Christian church throughout the ages has consistently and vastly used its agency to define, subdue, and even abuse the agency of women, particularly in light of fully unleashing the kingdom of God and the building up of the body of Christ within the church. Even in 2016 in the majority of United States' churches, women's leadership within churches outside of a children's ministry, women's ministry, hospitality ministry, prayer ministry, and sometimes worship ministry role is still seen as suspect if not even downright denied. Some women who have obvious teaching gifts, maybe even crossing over into preaching gifts (given the opportunity to exercise the latter), are relegated to teaching only other women and children, or possibly a congregation including both genders, yet only if she is under the authority of male headship. Women and their gifts are often considered threats to the entire church, threats that the leaders must control or manage so that women are not allowed to take over or fully unleash their gifts. This is done under the guise of historic biblical interpretation supposedly to protect the God-ordained way in which gender roles are enacted. This stance has been argued by evangelical Christian leaders, including John Piper and Wayne Grudem, who seek to define

biblical manhood and womanhood.¹⁰ This is juxtaposed to the “Blessed Alliance,” named and defined by author and speaker Carolyn Custis James: “The notion that things work better and human beings become their best selves when men and women work together is found on page 1 of the Bible. When God was launching the most ambitious enterprise the world has ever known, the team He put together to do the job was male and female.”¹¹ James continues to expound upon the impact of reading Scripture through the traditional patriarchal lens.

Here’s the problem: so long as patriarchy is enthroned as the gender message of the Bible, it poses a significant barrier to a strong and flourishing Blessed Alliance between men and women and a healthy, fully functioning body of Christ, which in turn inevitably hinders God’s mission in the world. It gives us no alternative but to circle the wagons theologically to protect this system, rather than the freedom to engage the cultural shifts and changes happening all around us. The kinder-gentler nuanced version of patriarchy often preached from Christian pulpits merely situates Christians on the world’s patriarchal continuum and by blending in (even as much improved version) renders the church incapable of generating jaw-dropping evidence that Jesus has come and that his kingdom is ‘not of this world.’¹²

Both men and women are meant to have full God-given agency in simultaneously ruling and subduing the earth and in using their God-given spiritual gifts to nurture, disciple, and grow the body of Christ within the church. Women are oppressed, undervalued, and relegated in the

¹⁰ “Founded in 1987, CBMW exists to equip the church on the meaning of biblical sexuality.” Under “Our History,” the specifics are given: “CBMW has been in operation since 1987, when a meeting in Dallas, Texas, brought together a number of evangelical leaders and scholars, including John Piper, Wayne Grudem, Wayne House, Dorothy Patterson, James Borland, Susan Foh, and Ken Sarles. These figures were concerned by the spread of unbiblical teaching. Under Piper’s leadership, the group drafted a statement outlining what would become the definitive theological articulation of ‘complementarianism,’ the biblically derived view that men and women are complementary, possessing equal dignity and worth as the image of God, and called to different roles that each glorify him.” Council on Biblical Manhood and Womanhood: A Coalition for Biblical Sexuality, accessed on October 16, 2016, <http://cbmw.org/about/history>.

¹¹ Carolyn Custis (James), “The Blessed Alliance: Men and Women Working Together for Good,” accessed October 16, 2016, <http://www.youthworker.com/youth-ministry/the-blessed-alliance-men-and-women-working-together-for-good>.

¹² James, *Malestrom*, 32-33.

church in the United States when women's gifts are stifled, leading to their vision being small. This has a direct effect on the full flourishing of the whole church spreading throughout the entire world. As this is allowed to continue, the future generations of the church will continue to be handicapped, receiving primarily the biblical teaching through the interpretive lens of patriarchy (prescribed gender roles) as they are not given the more complete picture of the *Imago Dei* fully functioning in the church as well as the world.

The patriarchal church model confines a woman's capacity within marriage

If the way the current church in the United States functions in regards to gender roles is formational to a woman's self-concept, how much more impactful is the bond of marriage as put forth and taught by the church? Since marriage was created by God and is formational for the spirit of both the male and female entering into this covenant relationship, how marriage is portrayed, especially by the church, is key to promoting either the flourishing or failure of the individuals and the new entity of the oneness of relationship between them and God. Much throughout the history of Christendom has been either directly or indirectly taught through the interpretive lens of patriarchy as it applies to marriage and the roles of husband and wife. Many among even the ancient church fathers believed that women were inherently the tool of the devil and did not have the same spiritual, intellectual, and emotional capabilities as men, so were, therefore, a necessary element for humanity's procreation while needing to be controlled and kept in their place.¹³

¹³ "The theologians, from Augustine to Aquinas to Luther and Wesley and Barth, were men. Women were excluded from this elite club [otherwise known as the patristics]. 'No Daughters of Eve Allowed' would have been a fitting sign on this clubhouse door. The woman, so the argument ran, was the one tempted by Satan and the first to fall into sin. She was more easily deceived than the man and thus would have been a menacing presence in the ivory towers of theological discussion and decision-making forums." Ronald W. Pierce, Rebecca Merrill Groothuis, and Gordon Fee, eds., *Discovering Biblical Equality: Complementarity Without Hierarchy* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press: 2005), 26.

The Struggle Towards Agency

A woman's experience of being oppressed forms her psyche. Whether in the larger social structure, the church, or marriage, if a woman is consistently given the message that she is invisible, her agency in relationships is diminished and she remains oppressed and imprisoned. Invisibility can be defined as when one's agency is confined or defined by perception and based on incomplete truth being filtered through cultural and religious socialization. With this type of invisibility, a person is physically seen, but emotionally, psychologically, intellectually, and even spiritually reduced to a type rather than a complete and even mysterious human being.

The experience of being invisible can seriously limit a woman's courage to enter into relational intimacy with both other women and men. This can result in a woman never or rarely having the opportunity to be affirmed for who she truly is and what she uniquely offers to the world. If a woman cannot wholly allow herself to be seen for who she is by others, how can she have the courage to face her own true self? If a woman cannot wholly allow herself to be seen for who she is by others, she is more susceptible to abuse by others, including abuse from others who may represent the Triune God to her.¹⁴ This life experience tends to form a woman's image more into that of an icon rather than a fully alive and vibrant human being.

In the Moslem countries, they make their women wear jubbah and yashmak. This makes them invisible, white wraiths drifting through streets buying a bit of fish or some vegetables, turning into dark narrow alleys and entering doors that slam shut loudly, reverberating among the ancient stones. People don't see them, they are less differentiated than the dogs that run among the fruit carts. Only the forms are different here. You don't really see the woman standing at the glove or stocking counter, poking

¹⁴ "...the male pastor embodies the generalized power of men as a class in our sexist society. In addition, the pastor's religious role carries with it significant inherent power and authority. The pastor is considered by many to be God's representative and mediator between the congregation and God. Because of the power advantage the male pastor has as a man plus the specific power of his pastoral position, he has, with perhaps very rare exceptions, significantly more power than any woman in his congregation." Carolyn H. Heggen, *Sexual Abuse in Christian Homes and Churches* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2006), 110.

among cereal boxes, loading six steaks into her shopping cart. You see her clothes, her sprayed helmet of hair, and you stop taking her seriously. Her appearance proclaims her respectability, which is to say she's just like all other women who aren't whores. But maybe she is, you know. Distinction by dress isn't what it used to be. Women are capable of anything. It doesn't really matter. Wife or whore, women are the most scorned class in America. You may hate niggers and PRs and geeks, but you're a little frightened of them. Women don't get even the respect of fear.¹⁵

Unfortunately, this merely iconic image of a woman imposed upon a woman's self-image is what a woman then typically projects to others, enacting a type of self-imposed boundary which is oppressive. Unhealthy self-imposed boundaries can keep a woman from both receiving her truest self as well as that of others. "The greatest gift any of us can give another is a transforming, receptive presence."¹⁶ In order to be genuinely hospitable to one's self and to others, a woman needs to be psychologically healthy enough to distinguish between healthy and unhealthy personal boundaries and be appropriately receptive to self-discovery.

Men are availed of their agency much more readily in society from birth.¹⁷ Women need to gain wisdom to discern what is true, throw off the baggage of their impotent, false self, and grow in knowledge and understanding of their true selves, learning to act with their own agency in the world.

Each woman has the potential to be her truest self as she is open to learning about herself by discovering her likes, her passions, her beliefs and living out her life through this lens.

¹⁵ French, *The Women's Room*, 13-14.

¹⁶ Richard Plass and James Cofield, *The Relational Soul: Moving from False Self to Deep Connection* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2014), 87.

¹⁷ "Most western languages themselves, in which the generic human is always masculine, testify incessantly to the misconception that humanity is originally and normatively male and that women are derivative and subordinate, if not actually misbegotten, version of the essentially male species. Male privilege, based on this erroneous assumption of male superiority, is firmly entrenched in virtually every sector of human life." Sandra M. Schneiders, *Women and the Word: The Gender of God in the New Testament and the Spirituality of Women* (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 1986), 5-6.

This self-knowledge is juxtaposed to ideas put upon a woman from outside of herself, when her family, friends, and social environment dictate a false self, worn like an ill-fitting garment. When patriarchy authoritatively imposes a false ideal upon a woman's self, her truest self is submerged.

In his book *The Gift of Being Yourself*, David Benner makes two observations concerning the false self. First, the false self is an image we create. Most of us create an image that is socially appropriate. As a result we receive affirmation and praise. Yet at its core, our construct is still an image, a façade. It is foreign to our truest identity as beings created in the image of God. Second, the false self will control us if we don't own it. It's impossible to change what is false if we don't take responsibility for it. But it's really hard to recognize something is false when we have spent our entire life creating it. Over the course of years it becomes our "me," the image we want others to see. On both accounts we are in the fight of our life. We are masters at creating an image. In our desperation each of us forms psychological defenses to protect ourselves from exaggerated shame, fear and guilt. We do this to feel safe and secure, because we are alone and no longer trust God completely.¹⁸

One's true self can remain invisible even to one's own self. It is deeply confusing when others' projected expectations regarding how to be and act conflict with one's internal perspectives that defy those expectations. Women are typically raised socially to please others, so the courage it takes to confound the expectations of others and social norms is formidable. For these reasons, it may take a woman a long time, if ever, to see and embrace her true self, to even come out of invisibility to her own self. Like a baby bird breaking out of its embryonic shell, it takes strength, persistence, and tremendous courage to break out and break free from prescribed confines into self-discovery. How does a woman learn to trust, and who does she trust when seeking to embrace her identity? "Our reactive mistrust is always with us. It infects our relationships with God and others. And in a profound way it alienates us from ourselves."¹⁹

¹⁸ Plass and Cofield, *Relational Soul*, 61.

¹⁹ Plass and Cofield, *Relational Soul*, 60.

Women, like men, are on a sometimes frightening and often delightful pilgrimage of self- discovery. The hindrance of patriarchy, a yoke she was not designed to bear, serves to seriously complicate and confuse her process of self-discovery. In this way, a woman's progress in self-realization toward the goal of self-giving is most often greatly delayed or even stunted.

A woman's ways of knowing increase her capacity for agency in the world

In their ground-breaking book, *Women's Ways of Knowing: The Development of Self, Voice, and Mind*, Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger, and Tarule "...examine women's ways of knowing and describe five different perspectives from which women view reality and draw conclusions about truth, knowledge, and authority. [They] show how women's self-concepts and ways of knowing are intertwined. [They] describe how women struggle to claim the power of their own minds."²⁰ In the plethora of interviews done with women from all walks and stages of life, overall, women have greater difficulty than men in feeling, owning, and taking up their own power, both in word and deed, in order for others to take them seriously and consider them equal leaders with men in life and the world.²¹ Because of the overwhelming reach and impact of patriarchy, women

...spen[d] their lives looking for some faithful authority to whom they [can] attach themselves—if not this father, perhaps this boyfriend or this husband. ...Society teaches women to put their trust in men as defenders, suppliers of the economic necessities, interpreters of the public will, and liaisons with the larger community. Women learn that men hold the power and in society's eyes have the ultimate authority. They are the esteemed teachers, the religious spokesmen, the medical, the military, the corporate, the respected creators.²²

²⁰ Belenky et al., *Women's Ways of Knowing*, 3.

²¹ Belenky et al., *Women's Ways of Knowing*, 4-5.

²² Belenky et al., *Women's Ways of Knowing*, 57-58.

The expectation that has been put upon men in a patriarchal system is lofty at least, and divine at most, and in light of humanity's sinful nature, the expectation is impossible to live out wholly. When men fail in their attempts to rule over society, women and children become restricted. Because the psychological barrier of patriarchy is daunting, it is understandable why women would choose to embrace and live into a perpetually subservient role rather than seek to disrupt and overturn the rule of patriarchy. Fortunately, many women have chosen to disrupt and overturn the rule of patriarchy throughout the ages. In most cases, the cost is formidable with society's anger increasing the woman's sense of rejection and isolation. A woman can choose to deny the fruition of her potential abilities and passions or pursue them at great social risk to herself and her relationships, only to find that what she ultimately reaches for is beyond her grasp within her culture because of the heavy oppression of the patriarchal system.

Whether a woman chooses to deny or risk the fruition of her potential abilities and passions, within the warp and woof of patriarchy, a woman is restricted either way. It is the woman's choice to surrender to the ultimate psychological consequences of being restricted or to set her sights on rising above. To rise above with strength, grace, forgiveness, joy, and compassion is how a woman can walk into unfolding freedom.

People need to have and own the reality of their individual power before they can effectively give it away to another for that person's good. A person needs to know her/his capacity to hold power and wield it on behalf of someone who needs it. Merriam-Webster defines *agency* as "the capacity, condition, or state of acting or of exerting power: operation; a person or thing through which power is exerted or an end is achieved: instrumentality."²³ The psychology of long-term oppression has significant effects on

²³ Noah Webster, *Merriam-Webster Dictionary*, s.v. "agency," accessed September 5, 2016, <http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/agency>.

a woman's agency. As Belenky et al. discovered, women experience seven "ways of knowing"²⁴ (not necessarily consecutively) before they become fully aware of and understand how to put forth their own agency. These ways are:

- 1 Silence
- 2 Received Knowledge: Listening to the Voices of Others
- 3 Subjective Knowledge: The Inner Voice
- 4 Subjective Knowledge: The Quest for Self
- 5 Procedural Knowledge: The Voice of Reason
- 6 Procedural Knowledge: Separate and Connected Knowing
- 7 Constructed Knowledge: Integrating the Voices²⁵

A woman must process through the first three categories before she really even begins to know that she has a voice and power in her own right.

Once the modest and often belated process of reliance on the self is initiated and supported, women typically move full speed into the subjectivist position on knowing. Subjectivism is for women a position from which they redefine the nature of authority. It is the position at which their views of experts and expertise undergo radical change. The orientation to authority shifts from external to internal. Along with the discovery of personal authority arises a sense of voice—in its earliest form, a 'still small voice' to which a woman begins to attend rather than the long-familiar external voices that have directed her life. This interior voice has become, for us, the hallmark of women's emergent sense of self and sense of agency and control.²⁶

Once a woman begins to hear and trust her own inner voice, however tentatively, she needs courage to believe its worth and move out into its truth. While her agency is in its early discovery phase, it has to be tested and tried but mainly protected until its benefit is further proven. "The form that multiplicity (subjectivism) takes in these women, however, is not at all the masculine assertion that 'I have a right to my opinion;' rather, it is the modest, inoffensive statement, 'It's just my opinion.' Their intent is to communicate to others the limits, not the

²⁴ Belenky et al., *Women's Ways of Knowing*, Table of Contents.

²⁵ Belenky et al., *Women's Ways of Knowing*, Table of Contents.

²⁶ Belenky et al., *Women's Ways of Knowing*, 68.

power, of their own opinions, perhaps because they want to preserve their attachments to others, not dislodge them.”²⁷

A good example of this is pointed out by Belenky et al.: “One college junior, an honors physics major, told us that she had been secretly working out a scientific thesis, which she dared not share with the male science faculty for fear of their ridicule or skepticism. Stating that ‘men don’t think women have any place in science,’ she told us that she was contemplating dropping out of college to seek a nonacademic community where she might feel freer to express what she feared were unorthodox scientific views.”²⁸

Conclusion

Though used typically to mean “peace,” the word *shalom* in the Hebrew language expresses more of a sense of completeness or wholeness. For a woman whose spirit and psyche have been shaped by a patriarchal society, the possibility of her experiencing true *shalom* becomes impossible or, at best, stunted. Unfortunately, even the largely patriarchal religious setting of the church impedes a woman’s self-concept both in the community of believers as well as in Christian marriage. By understanding and embracing her own sense of self, particularly her own potential, a woman can learn to own her power, which will have great effect on her agency in the world. This will begin to help her learn increasing wholeness in who she is and what she has to offer, and help her lean into greater intimacy with herself, others, and God.

²⁷ Belenky et al., *Women’s Ways of Knowing*, 66.

²⁸ Belenky et al., *Women’s Ways of Knowing*, 67.

CHAPTER 2

BIBLICAL/THEOLOGICAL ISSUES FOR WOMEN

“He who was seated on the throne said, ‘I am making everything **new** [emphasis mine]!’ Then he said, ‘Write this down, for these words are trustworthy and true’” (Revelation 21:5).¹ This is God’s promise, the promise for full redemption from the effects and consequences of human sin. The evidence of this promise being fulfilled is the death and resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ, the long-awaited Messiah who will one day bring this promise to humanity’s experiential completion. The Triune God has already reversed the curse of humanity’s sin through the perfect life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ, the Son of God and the Son of Man. Jesus ushered in God’s new kingdom of God’s reign (Luke 17:20-21), and those who believe in Christ are to walk in the reality of the kingdom of God here on earth now, though not yet in its fullness.

All things being made new in the reality of the kingdom of God here on earth includes the eradication of patriarchy.

Patriarchy is the cultural background against which God reveals the newness of his kingdom breaking through as he overturns cultural norms that issued from the fall of Adam and Eve. In the final analysis, the gospel and the kingdom of God are not endorsements for any world system that is familiar to us in this world. Jesus is making something new—recovering that missing chapter and the kingdom we lost sight of in the fall.²

The in-breaking of God’s kingdom on a darkened world that is entrenched in patriarchy is good news indeed for all humankind. Christ died to set humanity free and His death and resurrection

¹ Unless otherwise specified, all scriptural citations in this thesis-project are taken from the New International Version, Holy Bible, *New International Version*, NIV Copyright ©1973, 1978, 1984, 2011 by Biblica, Inc. Used by permission.

² Carolyn Custis James, *Malestrom: Manhood Swept into the Currents of a Changing World* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2015), 69.

secure the *shalom* of every person choosing to live into God's kingdom come and coming in increasing fullness until its perfect establishment.

Christians are to live into the present reality of God's kingdom

One of God's pronouncements of the natural consequence of Eve's disobedience, taking the bite of the forbidden fruit and offering it to Adam to do the same, was from Genesis 3:16: "Your desire will be for your husband, and he will rule over you." Although this is a consequence of the sin committed by the original man and woman in the Garden, it was never meant to be a sentence that was carried out through all of time. God did curse the ground and the serpent, however God's statement to Adam and Eve was not in the form of a curse. While a curse is permanent, Adam and Eve could be forgiven and restored. In the preceding verse, Genesis 3:15, God already gives humanity a glimpse of the One to come, the Lord Jesus Christ, who will redeem this situation, this broken way of relationship. Based on Christ's life, death, and resurrection, Christians for the past two thousand years have learned from Christ and His teachings that they are to live into the reality of the new kingdom that Christ's coming has inaugurated. This new kingdom is not one of reliving the continual chastisement of the consequences of humanity's sin. Instead, Christians are to live into the new reality of Christ's taking upon Himself the full chastisement for their sins, leaving humans to live into fullness and freedom in Christ. Christ received the judgment that was to be received by humanity. In Christ, those who believe in Him are now fully justified. And, in Christ, those who believe in Him are His new creation.

This means that a woman no longer needs to live under a yoke of oppression from patriarchy; she should not accept being treated as invisible based on her gender. A woman has been created by God for intimacy, that personal knowing that forms a bond of devotedness in all her relationships—with God, with others, and within herself. Intimacy is a personal knowing,

a constancy in relationship based upon devotedness between the people. It is not exclusive to marriage, although the intimacy inherent in a healthy, Christ-centered marriage is a reflection of the greater intimacy between Christ and His bride, the church. Intimacy is not merely knowing something about another person; rather, it is knowing the other person at an emotional and spiritual level, with the purpose of investing one's self into the life of the other. To live into intimacy with another requires intentionality of commitment, love, support, and listening for the heart of the other. When people choose intimacy with others, they enter into a relationship with others whose lives will shape their own. God models intimacy perfectly in the company of the Trinity and through God's unconditional love for and initiating in relationship with humankind. The prophet Jeremiah speaks for God saying, "The LORD appeared to us in the past, saying: 'I have loved you with an everlasting love; I have drawn you with unfailing kindness'" (Jeremiah 31:3). The purest intimacy has at its center pure love which only God can give. Jesus taught that, ultimately, intimacy with God is becoming one with God to the point that, out of loving surrender, one does only what God does. "Jesus gave them this answer: 'Very truly I tell you, the Son can do nothing by himself; he can do only what he sees his Father doing, because whatever the Father does the Son also does'" (John 5:19).

Whether speaking of intimacy in relationship to one's self, with others, or with God, this kind of personal knowing results in various levels of oneness. Intimacy grows in each of these relationships as one is accepted, deepens in understanding of one's self and the other/Other, and becomes increasingly free to give one's self away after embracing and possessing one's own self. The kind of intimacy that God models for humanity is synonymous with love. This is what God desires for humanity to experience with God, with one's self, and with others. This is the high ideal put forth to humankind in the greatest and second greatest commandments: "Jesus replied: 'Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your

mind.' This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.' All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments" (Matthew 22:37-40).

Through intimacy with God, herself, and others, a woman is free to flourish in who God has gifted and made her to be (not merely to take on a prescribed role), and she is encouraged to know her existential value and pursue relationship with God and other humans in all of her created fullness. For a woman, this is living into the present reality of the kingdom of God, which Christ inaugurated.

Christians live into the present reality of the kingdom of God through God's creational intent as
the "Blessed Alliance"

Patriarchy is a result of humanity's sin against God. It was not the original vision that God cast for God's image bearers living together in the Garden of Eden, ruling and subduing the earth. God's intent from creation was for male and female to live towards, as Carolyn Custis James aptly names it, the "Blessed Alliance." This biblical vision for the "Blessed Alliance" is further explained and filled out as James speaks with inspired insight of a "missing chapter" in the Bible. She speaks of how the book of Genesis opens with God's loving and unfolding vision for the world as expressed in chapters one and two. Here, God commissions the male and female together to participate with God in tending to God's creation and its burgeoning fullness. The reader of Scripture never gets to realize how this male and female will lovingly and creatively respond to God in this partnership before Satan enters in seeking to destroy. And destroy he does as this male and female believe his lie instead of God's truth.

God's image bearers rebel, and we are left in the ruins of a fallen world searching for clues to tell us what he had in mind for us. It's like trying to assemble a Mercedes from broken, rusted auto parts salvaged from a junkyard when you've never seen a Mercedes. ...This omission is not a mistake or a publishing snafu, but an Authorial decision intended to make us dissatisfied and hungry for something more and better

than anything we've yet seen. It makes us hungry for Jesus, who is the missing chapter and embodies the kind of image bearer God created all of his sons (and daughters) to become. Jesus didn't come just to tweak things, but to overthrow the kingdom of this world.³

Christians can live into the present reality of the kingdom of God because God is not defined or confined by gender

According to what is seen in the creation account, male domination in society was not God's intent. What about the appearance in Scripture that God seems to identify most often with the male gender through the use of male pronouns when referring to God? Does not that prove God's own affinity and preference for the male gender, seemingly giving special authority over the female? Genesis 1:27 is the account of God creating humankind: "So God created mankind in his own image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them." God creates both male and female in God's own image and both male and female equally in God's own image. If God is Spirit (John 4:24) and creates both male and female in God's image, then God is outside of humankind and the distinguishing identities of human gender.

God's words, recorded by men and given to God's people, came to humanity when the system of patriarchy was already firmly established through original sin and its unfolding consequences. Although God does refer to God's Self most often with the male gender through language references captured in the Bible, God also refers to God's Self as female in various sections of Scripture, even using maternal analogies between God's Self and God's people.⁴

³ James, *Malestrom*, 34.

⁴ Deuteronomy 32:11-12 God as a mother eagle watching over the nest and carrying her young on her wings; Deuteronomy 32:18 God as a mother who gives birth; Psalm 131:2 God as a mother holding a weaned child; Proverbs 1:20-33 Wisdom (God) is depicted as a woman; Isaiah 40:11 (ESV) God is depicted as a nursemaid to the lambs; Isaiah 42:14 God is depicted as a woman in labor; Isaiah 66:13 God is to

As a Creator who creates out of nothing, the Triune God is not contained within the gendered identity of what God creates, rather God expresses God's fuller Self to the world through the creation of both genders upon which God puts God's image, the *Imago Dei*. The expression of the creation is no more the entirety of who the Creator is as a piece of artwork is the entirety of the artist's output. God expresses God's Self through the male and female genders but is not confined by either or both genders. Surely, God's expression of God's Self through both genders in creating humanity highlights the equality and visibility of both male and female to the Triune God. God desires an intimate relationship with both the man and the woman, as they are each a vital representation of God's Self in the created world.

God being greater than created human gender divests God's Self of showing favoritism to either gender in ruling and subduing the earth. The Triune God reverses the curse of patriarchy and demonstrates that women are not invisible to God and that God seeks after them to pursue relationship just as God does with men.

Women's Visibility to God

Since patriarchy was not part of God's creational mandate (Genesis 1:27, 28) and God has not chosen to be identified with only one gender (John 4:24), women are certainly not meant to be invisible to God. This is confirmed in the pages of Scripture.

God reveals God's-Self to Hagar as "the God who sees"

James reminds the reader that "world history and church history are largely comprised of stories of men. Even in the twenty-first century, it's still considered breaking news and something of an anomaly when a woman appears on the global stage...."⁵ Very early on in the

Israel like a mother who comforts her young; Matthew 23:37 Jesus like a mother hen wanting to gather her chicks; Luke 15:8-10 God seeking the lost like a woman searching for a lost coin.

⁵ James, *Malestrom*, 39.

canon of Scripture, God is pictured as seeking out women, women who are living under the burdens of a male-dominated culture. In Genesis 12, God calls Abram to leave the land of his father and follow God. Along with that calling, God makes a covenant with Abram promising, among other things, to “make you into a great nation” (Genesis 12:2). Abram leaves Ur with his wife, Sarai, his nephew, Lot, and their worldly goods, which include human servants. When Abram and Sarai depart from Ur, they have no children and are far beyond typical child-bearing years. Ten years after Abram and Sarai were in Canaan, Abram was approximately eighty-five years old and Sarai was in her seventies. Sarai offers her servant, Hagar, to Abram as her surrogate to become pregnant with a child that would legally become their own. After Hagar becomes pregnant with Abram’s only child, deep rivalry ensues between Sarai and her maidservant, Hagar. Any relational intimacy Sarai and Hagar may have enjoyed was strained by the sexual intimacy between Abram and Hagar, which Sarai sanctioned. Hagar, though obeying her mistress, was subsequently betrayed by Sarai through Sarai’s disdain and abuse now that Hagar was pregnant. As an Egyptian slave, Hagar may have been personally learning to identify with her master and mistress’ God, *Yahweh*, though this was not the god of her youth. Being betrayed and neglected by her master and mistress after her obedience led to her pregnancy no doubt caused Hagar to question their God. Even a nascent faith in Abram and Sarai’s God was sure to be crushed by their further despising and devaluing her.

Fleeing her abuser, Hagar runs into the wilderness. This wilderness environment holds formidable challenges to a pregnant woman all alone. At a spring in the desert towards Shur,

the angel of the LORD appears to Hagar and questions her, inquiring about her journey. It is considered by scholars that this angel of the LORD is the pre-incarnate Jesus Christ.⁶

Who can fathom the magnificent grace of God in that very first time we encounter the visible Son of God is right here, at the spring beside the road to Shur, revealing Himself...to a woman not a man; to a servant, not a warrior; to an Egyptian, not a descendant of Abraham; to a sinner, not a saint; to a slave, not a king; to an outsider, not an insider. What an undeserved, compassionate intervention of the Creator in the life of one wounded woman. He intentionally sought and found her—while she was running!⁷

Being a slave and a foreigner must have been very stifling for Hagar. She was a prisoner to Abram and Sarai and had no say about her own thoughts, her worship practices, even her own body. Her soul was invisible to her owners. As a female slave in a strongly patriarchal culture, Hagar must have felt even somewhat invisible to her own self. Hagar was in a prison but not one of her own making. It was like

‘the grim tale of a woman’s claustrophobia when she cannot get out of the prison of the self or of her nightmare when she is kept from coming into her own self through the proximate existence of another or others’ (Mason, 1980, p. 234). ...[and in her it] evokes an arid wasteland or empty space, a kind of unrecognized no-woman’s-land, a refugee camp outside the official boundaries of belonging.⁸

How utterly life-changing it must have been to have God not only appear to Hagar but seek her out and see her! It had to release something in Hagar, some sort of courage and inspiration. As her response to God, Hagar returns to the home of Abram and Sarai. She gives birth to the legally born son of her master and mistress and watches him grow as the doted-upon only son of this couple. Together Abram and Sarai had yet remained infertile. Later in

⁶ “Scholars agree that the Angel of the Lord is a ‘theophany,’ or an appearance of the pre-incarnate Son of God. Astoundingly, He is Jesus before Bethlehem!” Anne Graham Lotz, *Wounded by God’s People* (Grand Rapids, IL: Zondervan, 2013), 85.

⁷ Lotz, *Wounded by God’s People*, 85.

⁸ Nicola Slee, *Women’s Faith Development: Patterns and Processes* (Hampshire, England: Ashgate Publishing, Ltd., 2004), 90.

Genesis 21:8-21, after Isaac, the long-awaited, promised son of Abraham and Sarah is born, Hagar and Ishmael find themselves yet again out wandering in the wilderness, having been kicked out of Abraham's house for good. And, yet again, God appears at a crucial time when Ishmael and Hagar cannot find water. God reveals God's Self to Hagar, reassuring her of God's "seeing" her and her son in distress. God continues to live up to the name Hagar gives God in Genesis 16:13, "She gave this name to the LORD who spoke to her: 'You are the God who sees me,' for she said, 'I have now seen the One who sees me'" (Genesis 16:13). Why would God reveal God's Self to Hagar, not once but twice, and have Hagar respond to God with this name for God if God was not pursuing intimate relationship with her? Why would God initiate relationship with Hagar if she were not precious to God and worthy of relationship? Why would God initiate relationship with Hagar if she did not need to become more visible to her own self, the Creator revealing to the created more of the intricacy of the treasure residing within her own soul?

Jesus seeks out the Samaritan Woman at the well, revealing He knows her completely

Two thousand years pass and God encounters another woman, a social outcast, at a well in the Samaritan town named Sychar. This time, it is God incarnate, Jesus Christ, who goes to a well in the middle of the day looking for water. The disciples were off finding food, leaving Jesus alone at the well. When the woman approaches the well (the timing of her coming to the well points to her being a social outcast), Jesus requests that she draw Him a drink. In doing so, Jesus breaks religious and social mores: a Jew speaking to a mixed-breed Samaritan; a man speaking to a woman, and especially one of ill-repute. In the book *Women's Ways of Knowing*, Belenky and her co-authors speak of a woman's detachment from her own point of view in an entrenched patriarchal society. Such detachment is evidenced in the Samaritan woman from her own point of view as she enters into conversation with Jesus. Because of her position in the

society of that day, the Samaritan woman had to muster great courage to enter into discourse with Jesus, especially in a public setting. The same centuries of patriarchal rule that contributed to a man's license to speak his truth and expect it to be valued were what concurrently devalued a woman's right and thought to speak her questions and views.

This Samaritan woman already had some difficult life experiences based on her five husbands and by the fact that she came to the well during the middle of the day by herself. Her sense of alienation was obviously great—from others, from God, and possibly even from her own self. Her imposed subjugation was already inherent in her authoritarian and patriarchal culture, which could only lend to shaping her own sense of self in similar fashion.

Jesus creates an environment for this woman where she no longer needs to remain invisible. She feels strangely safe and seen by this man as evidenced by her remaining at the well and participating in conversation with Him. As this Samaritan woman offers Jesus the water, she begins to engage with Jesus in a dialogue about finding living water and true worship. Jesus uses a metaphor "living water" to evoke this woman's mind and imagination, to teach her as He knows she will best learn.⁹ As Jesus slowly reveals Himself to this supposed stranger through their conversation, He clinches their discussion by telling her about the husbands she has had and the man with whom she is now cohabiting. When Jesus reveals Himself to her as the Messiah, the woman's excitement cannot be contained. "Then, leaving her water jar, the woman went back to the town and said to the people, 'Come, see a man who told me everything I ever did. Could this be the Messiah?' They came out of the town and made their way toward him" (John 4:28-30). The Samaritan woman at the well became the first

⁹ "It is...not surprising that metaphor and imaging emerged as a dominant means of faithing for the women in my research. The interviews revealed an extraordinary metaphoric potency amongst the women as they called upon a wide range of images, similes and analogies to articulate their experiences of faith...." Slee, *Women's Faith Development*, 66.

spontaneous missionary to a whole community as a result of Jesus waiting for her and initiating an encounter, pursuing her in relationship and calling her out of invisibility. Jesus validated her.

God promotes a woman's sense of agency in society and the church

Another way that God reverses the curse of patriarchy is by elevating women above their prescribed social confines, correcting the consequences of sin and promoting their sense of agency in society, the church, and marriage. In doing so, God brings women out of societal invisibility and moves them into the spotlight. This is evidenced through how her relationship with God, herself, and others comes to have great significance in God's activity in the world. Several biblical women's stories are set forth to offer a living reality of the promise of what life in the kingdom of God was meant to be. These stories can be found in both the Old and New Testaments and provide pictures of what a woman can be when she comes out of invisibility and puts her confidence in a loving God.

If one reads the biblical account through a patriarchal lens, the living reality of life in the kingdom of God will be skewed. Such a perspective will undoubtedly wrestle with how to explain God's calling of Deborah to lead a nation, or Huldah to prophesy to the nation of Israel and advise the king, or Junia to be an apostle of the early church (according to the apostle Paul). These and other stories of women in Scripture do not fit easily into the arc of Scripture when read from a patriarchal point of view.

[T]he 'man's world' mind-set is symptomatic of a world that has lost its center. The assumption that men own the stage or that the Bible gives preeminence to males over females positions men at the center. Inevitably this means men have turf to protect from each other and from women. It implies that women are to center their efforts on supporting and maintaining what God is doing through men. Women who rise to prominence today are perceived as threats; consequently, strong women in the Bible cannot be taken as exemplars for they are deemed aberrations and 'exceptions to the rule.'¹⁰

¹⁰ James, *Malestrom*, 40.

It is imperative that people reflect on their cultural biases when they read through Scripture and come to God's word with a truly humble spirit, knowing that each person has areas of blindness. Much like the blind men healed by Jesus, one always needs to come before God asking for eyes to see and hearts to believe beyond preconceived ideas.

The Bible reveals women in roles uncharacteristic in a patriarchal society

If patriarchy was not meant to be the creational mandate of God for humanity, then it would follow that a sovereign God might portray outstanding examples in Scripture of women rising above patriarchy's oppression.

Deborah becomes one of the twelve judges of Israel

Deborah, the fourth and only woman of Israel's twelve judges, stands out in the landscape of male leadership in the Old Testament. She was not only a judge but also a prophetess and a commanding leader in the army of Israel during a crucial battle. Interestingly, Deborah was also married, which poses a unique paradigm in a patriarchal society. One might better be able to fit Deborah as judge and prophetess into the patriarchal lens of interpreting Scripture if she were single and not under the authority of her husband. Deborah led the nation of Israel while doing so in a strongly patriarchal society in which the wife was thought of more as property and as a servant. This may offer the reader of Scripture a clue as to Deborah's self-esteem and confidence in her relationship with God (intimacy) and the gifts and calling of God on her life. Perhaps her husband was not threatened by her God-given gifts and skills and came alongside her in a supportive role? This is conjecture, but to be an Israelite male married to an Israelite wife who was a national and spiritual leader within a strongly patriarchal society had to make for a remarkable marriage relationship in that time.

Her leadership in battle sets the stage for capturing Sisera, the commander of Jabin's army, king of Canaan. Deborah's presence in battle is sought after to the point that Barak, a commander in Israel's army, refuses to do his part by leading ten thousand warriors in battle unless Deborah accompanies them. Agreeing to Barak's request, she goes with Barak and continues to direct his and the army's steps.

Then Deborah said to Barak, "Go! This is the day the LORD has given Sisera into your hands. Has not the LORD gone ahead of you?" So Barak went down Mount Tabor, with ten thousand men following him. At Barak's advance, the LORD routed Sisera and all his chariots and army by the sword, and Sisera got down from his chariot and fled on foot. Barak pursued the chariots and army as far as Harosheth Haggoyim, and all Sisera's troops fell by the sword; not a man was left. Sisera, meanwhile, fled on foot to the tent of Jael, the wife of Heber the Kenite, because there was an alliance between Jabin king of Hazor and the family of Heber the Kenite. (Judges 4:14-17)

How did a woman such as Deborah gain this sense of confidence both to hear people's complaints and judge them, and to strategize for and walk into battle leading Israel's army? Deborah's confidence in God along with her well-formed sense of self and well-utilized gifts from God cause her to be an outstanding judge in Israel's history. Integrity is apparent in Deborah, and integrity is developed through maturity. Entering into healthy intimacies with God, one's self, and others is one crucial way humans mature.¹¹

Deborah epitomizes a woman of integrity who has benefited from healthy intimacy with God, herself, and others, and uses her God-given strength to lead and counsel others. She is

¹¹ "...we are consciously acknowledging the mystery at the heart of human existence – that what we only gradually become, over years of growing, suffering, and learning, is known and willed from all eternity by the One who calls us into being. What is last in the order of accomplishment is actually first in the order of intention. That is, *God's* (author's emphasis) intention. And we ourselves discover most fully what we have always been intended to be, only at the end of all our journeying. What God originally 'intends' for us is not our addictiveness or compulsivity, not our personality disorders and defects, but the achievement of intimacy – with self, with others, and with God." Donald R. Hands, and Wayne L. Fehr, *Spiritual Wholeness for Clergy: A New Psychology of Intimacy with God, Self, and Others* (Lanham, MD: The Alban Institute, Inc., 1993).

brightly illuminated in Scripture primarily because of her ability to thrive as a female in a society that exercises male rule.

The Bible testifies to the wise, strategic, personal involvement and fast work of not only one, but two (Deborah and Jael) strong women in the account of Deborah to fight on behalf of the Israelites. These two married women, despite living in a patriarchal culture, exerted uncanny leadership on behalf of their God and people. “On that day God subdued Jabin king of Canaan before the Israelites. And the hand of the Israelites pressed harder and harder against Jabin king of Canaan until they destroyed him” (Judges 4:23-24). God subdued Jabin, king of Canaan, using two self-possessed women in a patriarchal society. Power is at the root of patriarchy and that power can sabotage a woman’s sense of self and her ability to know her true self and allow herself to be known by others.

If we do indeed need each other, then we dare not view our fundamental masculinity or femininity as the means to gain power [patriarchy] over the other or as a vehicle through which to enhance oneself by using the other. Instead, God has entrusted our fundamental masculinity and femininity to us for the sake of serving each other. therefore] ...we must embrace an understanding that focuses on effectiveness in assisting the other.¹²

Unless a woman has a deep sense of herself and her abilities—an intimacy with herself (some might otherwise call this self-confidence, although in Deborah's case, her confidence comes from God)—she cannot judge others, strategize a battle plan, and lead a nation to victory in battle. Such a woman has had to come to terms with her own ways of knowing in order to lead valiantly.

¹² Stanley J. Grenz, “Theological Approaches to Male-Female Relationships,” in *Christian Perspectives on Gender, Sexuality, and Community*, ed. Maxine Hancock (Vancouver, BC: Regent College Press, 2003), 98.

Job's daughters are named and become official inheritors of Job's estate after Job is restored

Another example of biblical women whose roles in a patriarchal society are highly uncharacteristic comes from Job 42:13-15. After the encounter between God and Satan in heaven, of which Job is not privy, Job is assaulted with great personal loss and pain. A massive part of his suffering is the death of all of his children all at one time. Job's testing and suffering continues and increases. Throughout thirty-seven chapters of discourse with his friends and silence from God, God finally speaks to Job with a breathtaking display of majestic glory and power. Job responds to God with humility and repentance (Job 42:6) and God then restores Job's priestly position and increases his previous fortunes. In this restoration, God blesses Job with ten more children—seven sons, and three daughters whose names were Jemimah, Keziah, and Keren-Happuch. Could such a mystical experience for Job have shifted or awakened his thinking regarding women? Could such a shift be the catalyst for a greater awakening for his daughters in a patriarchal culture? This is conjecture; however, Scripture proves that humans do not remain the same after a direct encounter with the Triune God.¹³

Like many Old Testament figures (Noah, Joseph, Moses), Job's life foreshadows the life of Christ. Job's righteousness and priestly acts on behalf of his children seem unparalleled in any other Old Testament character. He is ushered into what seems to be extraordinary suffering at

¹³ "The experience of breakthrough or awakening to new consciousness and spiritual vitality is described by a number of writers as a key component in women's spirituality. Having identified the experience of 'nothingness' as a common one in contemporary women's fiction, Carol Christ goes on to describe the process of (pg. 110) awakening which may follow, 'in which the powers of being are revealed' leading to 'a new sense of self and a new orientation in the world' (1986, p. 13), issuing, in its turn, in a 'new naming'. ... She suggests that, for women, the experience may have particular characteristics. Whereas for men, conversion often entails the giving up of worldly power, for women, 'awakening is not so much a giving up as a gaining of power [invisibility to becoming visible]..." Slee, *Women's Faith Development*, 109-110.

that time in history, and when he is restored, he is blessed with even more than he previously possessed.

This fruit-bearing of Job's period of suffering leads to the brand-new fruit of his ten new children. In a patriarchal culture, it is unusual to find the names of daughters! But these daughters are not invisible in the biblical account. These three daughters are not only identified by name but also treated in a manner unprecedented in a patriarchal society. Each is given the same inheritance as the sons:

The LORD blessed the latter part of Job's life more than the former part. He had fourteen thousand sheep, six thousand camels, a thousand yoke of oxen and a thousand donkeys. And he also had seven sons and three daughters. The first daughter he named Jemimah, the second Keziah and the third Keren-Happuch. Nowhere in all the land were there found women as beautiful as Job's daughters, and their father granted them an inheritance along with their brothers. (Job 42:12-15)

As Job is a type of Christ, Job's actions towards his daughters seem to be a preview of the new kingdom that Christ inaugurates. Women are seen, named, and are full inheritors and can function with full agency in the kingdom of God because they are fully vested by their Maker. As their relational value with their earthly father has apparently been elevated (above that of other daughters in a patriarchal society), so might Job's daughters have received that as a sign from their Creator, that God would hold them in the same esteem as a man, as their brothers.

In this new world where God's will is no longer thwarted, in other words, those struck down are raised up, the feminine is valued, oppressive power [patriarchy] is disempowered so that the powerless can triumph, the relationships of the world are reordered and hope is made new in Job's daughters. In this new vision Job sets the feminine free. Job uses his power to eliminate the divisions that put people in contention. Job uses his power to make his world whole.¹⁴

¹⁴ Joan Chittister, O.S.B., *Job's Daughters: Women and Power* (New York, NY: Paulist Press, 1990), 7.

Job's actions of giving an inheritance to his three daughters echoes across thousands of years to when the apostle Paul proclaims that in Christ's freshly inaugurated kingdom "there is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. If you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise" (Gal. 3:28, 29).

In the Bible, women will and do hold leadership roles in the church

God's biblical revelation is progressive to humanity. If God ordained Deborah to be a judge and military leader to the Israelites and revealed Job's giving equal inheritance to both daughters and sons, what will God continue to unfold for the church?

Joel prophesizes about God's Spirit being poured out on women to become prophets (Joel 2:28)

Before the church was yet born on Pentecost, the prophet Joel speaks forth God's truth about both men and women. "And afterward, I will pour out my Spirit on all people. Your sons and daughters will prophesy, your old men will dream dreams, your young men will see visions. Even on my servants, both men and women, I will pour out my Spirit in those days" (Joel 2:28, 29). Joel sets off God's servants, both men and women, as equal recipients of God's Spirit in those days, bringing women out of invisibility in society and to the forefront. What is poured out from God to God's people and needs to be released through God's people, men and women, young and old alike? Where does a woman receive such courage to speak forth and proclaim God's message in an oppressive patriarchal society? God is saying here that there will be a time in God's kingdom that women will be brought to the forefront to proclaim God's kingdom rule, which can only happen through a woman having the courage to step up in an otherwise patriarchal world. For women to have the courage to prophesy and exercise their spiritual gifts publically they will need to be freed, receiving some healing from God so that they know they are valued and valuable. Her sense of intimacy with herself, with God, and with others is what

will give her the impetus to proclaim the message God has given to her through the gifts God has bestowed upon her.

Joel's pronouncement of the Spirit of God being poured out on all people during the day of the Lord follows his prophetic words of God's judgment on God's people for their rebellious ways and unrepentant hearts. In this passage is pictured a microcosm of the macro effect of the ushering in of God's kingdom. God's judgment on sin will be replaced by God's favor because of the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. The dwelling place of God will no longer be a temple built by human hands but rather will reside in the heart of the human created by God. Women as well as men will be able to enjoy the residing Holy Spirit within them, closer to them than even their very breath. Women as well as men can enjoy unsurpassing intimacy with the Triune God through the indwelling Spirit of God. Women who were once only allowed in the women's section of the temple, further removed from the men and priests of God, could now themselves enter into the new Holy of Holies in their very hearts. Along with men, women would now be considered priests of God because the Spirit of God resides in them. A culture established on the pretense of patriarchy will be challenged and changed by the Spirit of God. Women's intimacy with God, herself, and others will increasingly flourish through God's kingdom rule and result in richly blessing all.

Women become leaders of the first-century church in fulfillment of Joel's prophecy

When the apostle Paul writes to the Christians in Rome, his concluding chapter mentions many women with varying roles in the church in that city. Twenty years later, after the death and resurrection of Christ and the birth of the church, Paul publically recognizes many women in Romans 16 who have become an integral part of the daily ministries of this Christian community. Note the women who hold roles of leadership such as Phoebe, the deacon (16:1), and Junia, the apostle (16:7). While the history of these women and their stories is not fully

known, Paul's mention of them is remarkable in that he commends them for their work and leadership in the church. Through the historical documentation of women taking an active part in leading the church of Christ as evidenced in Romans 16, Joel's prophecy (2:28, 29) seems to be coming into greater fulfillment. As the women of the early church believed in Christ's love for them and as Christ demonstrated to women their value and calling in His kingdom, they responded by coming forward publically to serve, lead, and exercise their spiritual gifts in the church. This they did in direct opposition to the strongholds of patriarchy in both the Jewish and Greek cultures of that era.¹⁵ As women began their journey of intimacy with Christ, their internal knowing and awareness began to increase, and their courage to step out in new ways relationally with others grew. Women began to respond to Christ's call on their lives with faith, confident that Christ would make them new in His new kingdom where no one would be unseen and undervalued. Knowing God, self, and others in a committed and devoted way could now be the trajectory of women's entire lives, and hope for increasing visibility was unleashed with Christ's authority.

The Trinity is the model for a woman's relational intimacy

As defined previously in this chapter, intimacy is a personal knowing, a constancy in relationship based upon devoted love for one another. The roles played out in society and the

¹⁵ "The position of women in the Mediterranean world of the first century differed from culture to culture. In general it is possible to say that women were nowhere totally free or equal. ...First century Judaism lived in the Roman empire and in the cultural milieu of Hellenism. It was unable to ignore secular culture, but had to react to it positively or negatively. Christianity was born into this complex and syncretistic world. The societies of this world still by and large advocated the traditional role of subordination and silence of women as the ideal." Elizabeth M. Tetlow, "The Status of Women in Greek, Roman, and Jewish Society" Wijngaards Institute for Catholic Research, accessed March 5, 2018, <http://www.womenpriests.org/classic/tetlow1.asp>.

church are all intended to be an outgrowth of the Christian's intimacy with God. Gilbert

Bilezikian explores this personal knowing, this constancy in relationship in these words:

The silent churning at the core of our being is the tormenting need to know and to be known, to understand and to be understood, to possess and to be possessed, to belong unconditionally and forever without fear of loss, betrayal, or rejection. It is the nostalgia for our primal oneness, the silent sorrowing for paradise lost, the age-long pursuit after the encompassing embrace for which we know we were created. It is the search, however wanton and sullied, for the pristine grace of holding and being held, for the freedom to be who we really are without shame or pretense, for release and repose in the womb-like safety of unalterable acceptance and of overarching love.¹⁶

The Trinity of God is the basis for such intimacy. The Creator, Redeemer, and Sustainer-God live in perfect union with one another and have equal and distinguished power within their perfect companionship. In his book *Community 101: Reclaiming the Local Church as Community of Oneness*, Bilezikian quotes and expounds on the Evangelical Theological Society's doctrinal statement of the Godhead as Trinity being "each an uncreated person, one in essence, equal in power and glory."¹⁷ There is no sense of hierarchy among the Persons of the Trinity according to this definition.

From the relationships within the Triune Godhead, relationships are modeled for Christ-followers. Like the Trinity, relational unity and satisfaction are the goals for believers in relationship with God and others. The separate but equal relationship demonstrated among the

¹⁶ Gilbert Bilezikian, *Community 101: Reclaiming the Local Church as Community of Oneness* (Grand Rapids, IL: Zondervan, 1997), 15.

¹⁷ "The doctrinal statement of the Evangelical Theological Society describes the biblical teaching about the Godhead as the original community of oneness in a single sentence: 'God is a Trinity, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, each an uncreated person, one in essence, equal in power and glory.' Despite its brevity, this marvelous formulation goes to the heart of the matter. It defines the oneness of the Father, Son, and Spirit as pertaining to the essence of being of God. But it also extends this quality of oneness to the activities or functions of the members of the Trinity since they are said to be 'equal in power.' This summary affirms the essential oneness of the members of the Trinity while disallowing any notion of ranking or of hierarchy among them. Because God is absolute, the oneness of the Trinity is absolute. If any part of the Trinity were less than absolute in essence or in function, the Godhead would also be less than absolute." Bilezikian, *Community 101*, 18.

Godhead is the ultimate destination for intimate mutuality in human relationships. While God is infinitely greater than human beings and not equal, God created human beings for deep intimacy and satisfaction in God foremost. When the source of relational intimacy is God, then human intimacy can flourish.

Mary and Martha enjoy a close relationship with Jesus as His friends

As an example from the New Testament, Mary and Martha enjoy a close relationship with Christ as His friends, along with their brother Lazarus. Scripture unfolds more of Christ's conversations with Mary and Martha than it does with Lazarus. The Gospel of John 11:5 speaks of Jesus' love for these three siblings. Within the account of Lazarus' death and resurrection in John 11:1-44, there are moving encounters between Jesus and Martha, and Jesus and Mary. John 11:33-34 points out the possibility of Jesus' anger¹⁸ as a result of seeing Mary and the masses weeping. Anger may not have been all Jesus felt at that moment. Being fully God, He certainly realized that the chasm of separation and pain experienced through physical death between humans is only a reflection of the greater chasm that exists between a holy God and sinful humanity apart from Christ's atonement. One of the many consequences of sin is an irreparable breach in intimacy between God and humanity as well as between individual persons apart from Christ's atonement. Anger is an emotion that is rooted in a desire for and frustration of relational intimacy. If anger is "a strong feeling ...of antagonism," then Jesus may have been experiencing both the suffering inherent in sinful humanity from the powerful separation that occurs in death as well as the righteousness of God to rise up against it in order to provide the means to relational intimacy.

¹⁸ Merriam-Webster defines "anger" as "a strong feeling of displeasure and usually of antagonism." *Merriam-Webster Online Dictionary*, s.v. "anger," accessed July 25, 2017, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/anger>.

Luke 10:38-42 depicts Jesus at the home of Martha and Mary in Bethany. Martha prepares a meal for Jesus while Mary sits at his feet to listen to and commune with Jesus. When Martha gets annoyed with Mary for not taking her place to help her prepare the meal, she speaks to Jesus about her annoyance. Martha does not merely comply with what is happening by quietly continuing the meal preparations as expected of a woman in her day. She expresses her resentment and feels safe to do so in front of Jesus.

That Martha would even offer her complaint to Jesus publicly indicates that she felt a level of intimacy in relationship with Him. Jesus' response reveals His love for both women. He does not put Martha down for her service or for how she feels and also points out that Mary chooses what is good and seeks to learn from Jesus' teachings. Mary draws near to Him through understanding the Scriptures. Through His response, Jesus validates Martha's feelings and burden, and offers her an unexpected opportunity. In essence, Jesus is reminding them of what He knows and spoke back to Satan in His first wilderness temptation, "Man shall not live on bread alone but on every word that comes from the mouth of God" (Matthew 4:4). Jesus, as the ultimate rabbi, invites Mary to sit at His feet. And He invites Martha into the same opportunity for intimacy with Him as He did every woman or man who wanted to draw near.

Conclusion

Patriarchy is an oppressive burden that can dislodge and disconnect a woman's wholehearted response of loving obedience to God. Referring to Jesus' parable in Matthew 25:14-30 about a master who gives talents to his servants expecting them to use and increase those talents, Gilbert Bilezikian issues a strong caution to Christians:

The sobering truth of this parable is that God will hold each believer individually accountable for failure to invest fully his or her giftedness into ministry. God will not question some pastor or priest about our failure. It is our personal responsibility to find the environment or place of service where our talents can be invested without hindrance, to the full extent of our gifting. According to Jesus' parable, excuses will not

be tolerated because the work of the kingdom deserves nothing less than the total commitment of all its members.¹⁹

God is jealous for God's people and the gifts God has bestowed upon them. And God is jealous for the hearts of God's people, for their participating in relationship with the Triune Godhead so that they might thrive and be instruments of ushering in God's kingdom. Women are certainly not invisible to God. God is calling women out of their experience of invisibility in a world of strong patriarchy to become integrated, to pay attention to what they feel, think, and hear, and engage with it. The Triune God invites women into this wholeness and knows that women who are in touch with and intentional to integrate what they know, see, and hear can reach their potential as effective disciples.

God elevates women above their prescribed patriarchal confines so that their full personality and agency might be released for God's glory. The stories of many women in Scripture prove that God desires and pursues intimacy with women as much as God does with men. Since the Garden, God has been about reversing the curse of patriarchy and its effects on women and the world. Hallelujah!

¹⁹ Bilezikian, *Community 101*, 180.

CHAPTER 3 LITERATURE REVIEW

In the last few decades, many writers have brought light to the issue of women, invisibility, and intimacy in the midst of a patriarchal culture. Studies have been carried out and materials have been highlighted to bring insight and understanding as to how a woman's social and psychological invisibility affects her ability to experience intimacy when soaked in patriarchal waters. Authors from the Christian perspective have contributed to this subject as well, and have challenged how the Scripture reader's social, cultural, and historical lens impacts how one understands biblical truths. Whether representing a faith perspective or not, the writings detailed below are valuable resources for those seeking to delve into the problem in order to participate in righting this injustice to society.

From a sociological and psychological perspective, a foundational book for this thesis is *Women's Ways of Knowing: The Development of Self, Voice, and Mind*, coauthored by M. F. Belenky, B.M. Clinchy, N.R. Goldberger, and J. M. Tarule.¹ Through their research Belenky et al. document how a woman moves out of silence/invisibility into discovering, owning, and using her voice in her world and society. Interviewing one hundred and thirty-five women for two to five hours each, the authors used a case study structure to allow the interviewee to respond more spontaneously with her own words. Although the women in the study were from diverse backgrounds and educational influences as well as age ranges, Belenky et al. discovered that they repeatedly spoke of their realization of self as coming from a combination of understanding their own thoughts and learning to voice them, often in a hostile patriarchal environment. The authors documented and then categorized seven ways of realization (through received,

¹ Mary Field Belenky, Blythe McVicker Clinchy, Nancy Rule Goldberger, and Jill Mattuck Tarule, *Women's Ways of Knowing: The Development of Self, Voice, and Mind* (New York, NY: BasicBooks, 1997).

subjective, procedural, and constructed knowledge) and learned that women's engagement with those ways was not necessarily consecutive. Also evident in their research findings is the unique way in which women derive their understanding and sense of self through their interpersonal relationships, their connectivity. Considering the conversations within the family environment and the ways human development is depicted within those conversations, Belenky et al. point out the gender differentiations in such discussions and how the seven ways of knowing for women influence their family relationships. Finally, the authors apply their research towards the betterment of shaping education for women.

Motivated by the question of why women are twice as likely to experience depression as men, Dana Crowley Jack wrote *Silencing the Self: Women and Depression*.² What happens when women are repeatedly belittled and undervalued in their relational encounters in a patriarchal society? Jack points out that a woman's sense of self through this kind of repeated relational encounter can drive a woman into depression as she takes in the message to silence herself. Through patriarchy's pervasiveness, women have been socialized to diminish themselves to the point of losing themselves entirely in a relationship, mainly from the fear of losing love itself. Jack reveals that women's depression results from a loss of self, which is disorienting and, if there is no self, then there is no receptor for love. The journey out of depression for women affected in this way comes through discovering one's authentic self and learning to no longer repress that self. Jack concludes that there must be an "I" first for a woman to enter into a satisfying two-way relationship where she might continue to develop that "I" and move out of anger towards healing and contribution of her authentic self to others.

² Dana Crowley Jack, *Silencing the Self: Women and Depression* (New York, NY: HarperCollins, 1993).

Such movement requires the woman to take up courage and embrace a new framework in order to re-create a sense of self outside of the old confines.

Through the genre of a novel, *The Women's Room* by Marilyn French³ offers insight into women's invisibility and how this affects her experience of intimacy in a patriarchal world. From the main character, Mira, as well as through the unfolding story of other men and women in relationship with Mira, French portrays the stark reality and pain of invisibility, having produced the deep conviction of injustice from this experience. This novel literally begins with the main character hiding in an institutional women's room and her metaphorical movement out of that room into a truer sense of herself. Written in 1977, this story is a generational tale of the invitation to embrace and discover the mystique of the feminine as defined increasingly by females (not males). Though a novel, this book could be considered the biography of every woman's awakening to her invisibility and her movement into freedom through revelation and experiencing authentic intimacy with herself and others.

As then president of Saint Mary's College in Notre Dame, Indiana, Joan Chittister, O.S.B. gave a lecture in 1990 entitled "Job's Daughters: Women and Power,"⁴ which is available in book form by Paulist Press. Based on the account of Job in the Old Testament, Chittister highlights Job's response to his friends' accusations regarding his suffering. While Job's friends seem to pummel Job using accusations that fall into categories of God's will, sin, obedience, and wisdom, Job denounces traditional formulas of interacting with God and decries the injustice from his friends. Equating Job's friends, who judge primarily with human understanding, with the "system" (that puts even more of a burden on the sufferer), the author purports that, when

³ Marilyn French, *The Women's Room* (New York, NY: Summit Books, 1977).

⁴ Joan Chittister, O.S.B., *Job's Daughters: Women and Power* (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 1990).

God's kingdom is established, there will be no contest to God's goodness. While Job is a sinner in need of God's righteousness, in God's kingdom, Job is not condemned eternally to suffer for his sin but rather is freed to live into the *shalom* of God. In the same way, women are no longer bound to the system of patriarchy which continually oppresses its female sufferers. As Job responds to God's defense of him before his friends, Job lives into increased blessings and uses his influence to empower those being oppressed by the system, namely his new daughters. In "Job's Daughters: Women and Power," Chittister cites Rollo May's explanation of power in five kinds: exploitative, competitive, manipulative, nurturant, and integrative.⁵ She discusses how these models of power represent particular worldviews that largely describe the history of women. She also urges development of the theology of power⁶ so that men and women might truly function with equality as the priesthood of believers. Out of Job's suffering, he saw his world with new eyes and sought to right the injustice he saw as God defended him. Chittister's writing is presented from primarily a political and theological viewpoint.

*Women's Faith Development: Patterns and Processes*⁷ by Nicola Slee was one in a series of books exploring "practical, pastoral, and empirical theology." Based on James Fowler's theory of faith development,⁸ Slee seeks to address the absence of research on the faith development

⁵ Exploitative – "...power that uses the other for the service of self"; Competitive – "...power used for conquest"; Manipulative – "...power used indirectly to manage [another]"; Nuturant – "...power that works for the sake of the other";and Integrative – "...power that is devoted to mutual concern." Chittister, *Job's Daughters*, 12, 17, 23, 35, 41 respectively.

⁶ "It is one thing to talk about democracy and collegiality, about equality and the priesthood of all the believers, about universal political participation and charism, about opportunity and grace. It is another thing entirely to develop the kind of theology of power that will honestly enable the accomplishment of these concepts." Chittister, *Job's Daughters*, 11-12.

⁷ Nicola Slee, *Women's Faith Development: Patterns and Processes* (Hampshire, England: Ashgate, 2004).

⁸ "In his [1981] book *Stages of Faith*, James W. Fowler developed a theory of six stages that people go through as their faith matures based on the Piaget stages and Kohlberg stages. The basic theory can be

of women. In this book, she presents thirty women and their experiences of faith in the Christian tradition, transparently citing her own faith journey as the impetus of her research. She also specifically expressed her intention to be part of developing a feminist methodology in research, in contrast to most historical research, which is centered on males. In a more precise way, the writer gives her definition of feminism⁹ and speaks of it in light of other forms of oppression.¹⁰ As Slee highlights her findings, she compares and contrasts them in light of Fowler's theory, pointing out where his theory holds up or falls short with regards to women's faith development. Specifically, the author categorizes patterns of women's awakening, alienation, and relationality and how these patterns might apply to both the understanding of women's faith stories and the pastoral care for women.

Playing on the word *maelstrom* and its meaning,¹¹ Carolyn Custis James wrote a profound book entitled *Malestrom: Manhood Swept into the Currents of a Changing World*.¹² James explores the sociology and theology of what it means to be a Christ-following man in a twenty-first-century patriarchal culture. Even in the church, both men and women have become

applied, not only to those in traditional faiths, but those who follow alternative spiritualities or secular worldviews as well." *Psychology Charts*, accessed March 5, 2018, <http://www.psychologycharts.com/james-fowler-stages-of-faith.html>.

⁹ "...feminism is a political and personal commitment arising out of an understanding of the structural inequality that pertains, and has pertained throughout all known human history, between the sexes, such that men, as a group, have exercised power and control over women as a group, with the result that women's knowledge, experience and history have been systematically repressed." Slee, *Women's Faith Development*, 11.

¹⁰ "...racism, ageism, classism, and so on." Slee, *Women's Faith Development*, 12.

¹¹ Merriam Webster defines "maelstrom" as: "a powerful often violent whirlpool sucking in objects within a given radius." *Merriam-Webster Online Dictionary*, s.v. "anger," accessed March 1, 2018, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/anger>.

¹² Carolyn Custis James, *Malestrom: Manhood Swept into the Currents of a Changing World* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2015).

caught up in a narrow prescription of what it means to be a man/woman with seemingly clearly defined biblical interpretations of male and female roles. The vast global domination of patriarchy feeds into the prominence of men needing to prove themselves repeatedly. Too often this results in the increasing prevalence of violence largely initiated by men worldwide. Beginning with humanity's rebellion against God in Paradise, both male and female lose their "Divine center," and patriarchy (among a whole host of other sins) ensues. James highlights the "Father Wound" of Judah, one of Jacob's sons; the striking leadership of Deborah; the "Blessed Alliance" of Ruth and Boaz; the hatred of one's brother in Cain and Abel; the humility of Joseph and Mary; and Jesus' example of lovingly raising up the oppressed and marginalized. She puts forth a larger holistic hermeneutic of the pre-fall Genesis charge to the man and woman to "rule and subdue" and helps the reader see clearly how this is to inform living in God's kingdom here on earth as it is in heaven. According to Jesus' example, men are to reject the prevalent tyranny of patriarchy and embrace Jesus' way of lovingly giving one's power away to uplift, serve, and promote the oppressed rather than rule over, even in the form of a soft patriarchy. The church is being challenged to hold up the mirror of the gospel to herself and let Jesus be released from an ancient and destructive stereotype in order that His Spirit might be more fully released in this world to unleash the blessing of God to all.

Gilbert Bilezikian's *Community 101: Reclaiming the Local Church as Community of Oneness*¹³ seeks to raise the church out of the patriarchal ash heap. A strong argument is made for biblical marriage modeled after the perfect unity based upon the equality of the members of the Triune God. Since the threefold Godhead models exquisite community for marriage, it was out of that original family that the community in the church of Christ is to be an exhibition of

¹³ Gilbert Bilezikian, *Community 101: Reclaiming the Local Church as Community of Oneness* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1997).

community resurrected. Oneness was always and will always be the explicit desire and purpose of God for God's church. Jesus prayed this in His high priestly prayer: "...that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you" (John 17:21). After Jesus prayed this prayer, He went to the cross to accomplish this for the church, reconciling humans to God and imparting to the church the ministry of reconciliation (2 Corinthians 5:18-20). The enemy of both God and humanity is Satan, who is always about destroying God's work of oneness. Bilezikian claims that rather than the church leading the way with modeling unity and oneness in the world, the church lost its identity. "The church was for them a habit without definition. They [those in the church] had been trained to play church or to do church instead of being the church."¹⁴ How can the church return to its intended purpose of reconciliation and oneness with God and humanity? The author states that the church must do deep soul-searching and, from that, intentionally establish healthy structure, fostering authentic relationships and learning to honestly work with one another in mutuality. Jesus taught the disciples a congregational governance of how to live in community. Likewise, the church needs to allow for each person to grow in understanding of biblical principles as guided by the Holy Spirit, share their voice, and together, seek to discern God's will among the community. This happens most effectively when the spiritual gifts of individuals within the church are freely identified and utilized (not through the grid of assigned gender-roles) for the building up of the body of Christ. Oneness comes out of authentic community that is birthed in the mutuality of the Trinity and reflected in the humble inter-dependence of every believer according to their respective gifts and callings.

¹⁴ Bilezikian, *Community 101*, 49.

Maxine Hancock edited the papers presented at a Regent College symposium in 1999 exploring “Christian Perspectives on Gender, Sexuality, and Community.”¹⁵ The essays contained therein seek to address the divisions present in the church, specifically in the three areas of gender, sexuality, and community. These essays represent a cross-cultural and cross-disciplinary view, all from professors of either Regent College or Carey Theological College. Hancock highlights excellent questions, such as “How is the fellowship of believers distinctive in our attitudes and actions as we relate to each other as women and men? What attitudes towards each other should mark it? What graces should this community demonstrate?”¹⁶ After carefully defining key terms, such as *feminism*,¹⁷ *gender*,¹⁸ and *sexuality*,¹⁹ the editor writes of the social tensions between the culturally liberal and conservative views and how Christ followers need to be people who “will always live in a critical tension with cultural norms, and will critique these norms and call for transformation in the direction of holiness, healthfulness and wholeness at every point of human relationship.”²⁰ The overall goal of the symposium and this publication was to dialogue about these issues while demonstrating “courtesy and mutual

¹⁵ Maxine Hancock, ed., *Christian Perspectives on Gender, Sexuality, and Community* (Vancouver, BC: Regent College, 2003).

¹⁶ Hancock, *Christian Perspectives on Gender, Sexuality, and Community*, 15.

¹⁷ “...systemic oppression of women.” Hancock, *Christian Perspectives on Gender, Sexuality, and Community*, 18.

¹⁸ “...roles and assignments associated with being male and female within culture.” Hancock, *Christian Perspectives on Gender, Sexuality, and Community*, 14.

¹⁹ “...a particular community – believers in the Risen Christ.” Hancock, *Christian Perspectives on Gender, Sexuality, and Community*, 14.

²⁰ Hancock, *Christian Perspectives on Gender, Sexuality, and Community*, 16-17.

respect”²¹ and presenting solid scholarship based on a Christ-centered theological approach regarding these relevant issues.

Humans form their deepest connections with God, themselves, and others through increasing awareness of how and when they choose to live into pretense versus authenticity, and consciously choosing to live into the latter. Another way of speaking about such an understanding is by referring to the false self and the true self, respectively. Richard Plass and James Cofield, authors of *The Relational Soul: Moving from False Self to Deep Connection*,²² identify the “reactive” false self and the “receptive” true self residing inside of each person. One’s psychological formation affects one’s spiritual formation and Plass, a counselor, and Cofield, a spiritual director, reveal the outcome of this reality through giving accounts of real human stories. Early experiences and memories condition humans to respond either from a place of mistrust or trust of others. God’s loving and gracious presence in one’s life can bring first, revelation to one’s mistrusting reactions, then healing as God lovingly traverses the individual’s head and heart connection. Through both self-awareness and “soulful” relationships, God can more completely integrate one’s mind and heart, creating the way for more mutually satisfying relationships. Plass and Cofield relate how practicing spiritual disciplines²³ ultimately further the process of and joy derived from increasing relational intimacy with God, one’s self, and others. According to the authors’ research, those who choose to

²¹ Hancock, *Christian Perspectives on Gender, Sexuality, and Community*, 19.

²² Richard Plass and James Cofield, *The Relational Soul: Moving from False Self to Deep Connection* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2014).

²³ “From its beginning the church linked the desire for more of God to intentional practices, relationships and experiences that gave people space in their lives to ‘keep company’ with Jesus. These intentional practices, relationships and experiences we know as *spiritual disciplines* (author’s emphasis).” Adele Ahlberg Calhoun, *Spiritual Disciplines Handbook: Practices that Transform Us* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2005), 17.

engage more intently with their relational soul before God will notice greater openness of heart, attentiveness of heart, curiosity of heart, acceptance of limits and losses, forgiveness, and willingness to begin again. Ultimately, this is the path to learning to love God above all else, and love others as one loves one's self.

In *Wounded by God's People: Discovering How God's Love Heals Our Hearts*,²⁴ Anne Graham Lotz uses the account of Hagar in the book of Genesis to enlighten the reader about God's love for those wounded by God's people in particular. Lotz reminds the reader that Jesus was wounded by God's people and He set the example of breaking the chain of the wounded becoming those who wound. The wounded person can identify with Hagar, who having been used and abused by others, experiences marginalization in her society. The wounding is particularly profound as it comes directly from God's chosen people, Abram and Sarai. As Hagar enters a self-imposed exile from the people of God (Abram and Sarai), so the wounded often endure the same, or even an exile imposed from those doing harm. The author speaks from her own experience as well and identifies possible blind spots for the wounded while acknowledging that everyone is wounded. When the temptation may be to enter a self-imposed exile after being wounded, the reality is that one can never outrun God who constantly seeks to love and provide. God reveals God's Self to Hagar, speaks with her, and provides for her, giving her promises that renew her hope as she returns to reside with her wounders. Even in the wilderness times, God is watching, working, and inviting those victimized to wait upon God. A wound sustained will be transformed from a death blow into a life-giving miracle when the wounded one cooperates with the Wounded Healer Jesus Christ. Hagar obediently responded to God's directive as did Jesus when He was in the Garden of Gethsemane. Hagar's obedience

²⁴ Anne Graham Lotz, *Wounded by God's People: Discovering How God's Love Heals Our Hearts* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2015).

produced a new nation and Jesus' obedience made the way for all nations to be reconciled to God by putting their trust in Christ's atoning work.

For those seeking a biblical rationale for patriarchy, see the website for The Council on Biblical Manhood and Womanhood (CBMW).²⁵ There the authors promote an interpretation on the complementary nature of men and women from what can be considered a biblical perspective. This group, led by John Piper, began in 1987 and included six men and women. The Council's Danvers Statement defines their "complementarianism" as men and women having different roles that are "complementary" though created and valued by God equally. Complementarianism purports a hierarchy (soft patriarchalism) since men are still the established leaders over women in the church as well as in the home (in spite of sharing in similar spiritual gifts). The Council on Biblical Manhood and Womanhood was a direct response to the rise of feminism in the church, particularly to those who were espousing evangelical feminism.

Evangelical "egalitarianism" would be the contrasting biblical view from complementarianism. It affirms that men and women are both created and valued equally by God and promotes the mutuality of women serving alongside men where, according to their spiritual gifts, women are encouraged to lead and teach in both the church and at home. Christians for Biblical Equality²⁶ was organized in 1987 and included evangelical leaders such as Dr. Catherine Clark Kroeger, Dr. Alice Mathews, Dr. Berkeley, Alvera Michelsen, and Dr. James Beck. Along with other leaders, they came together to publish the Priscilla Papers, an academic

²⁵ Council on Biblical Manhood and Womanhood: A Coalition for Biblical Sexuality, accessed August 15, 2017, <http://cbmw.org>.

²⁶ Christians for Biblical Equality International, accessed December 5, 2017, <https://www.cbeinternational.org>.

publication promoting the biblical equality of women. Christians for Biblical Equality (CBE) was officially founded in January 1987, standing in contrast to Christians for Biblical Manhood and Womanhood.

The voices of these writers all contribute in their unique ways to the great need for and importance of women being seen and heard to eradicate patriarchy. Even the one resource that promotes men and women's defined roles serves to reveal the very real risk of many women's voices and gifts being stifled in the kingdom of God. What is the body of Christ lacking, how is it hurting, when women remain invisible due to patriarchy? All of this research and writing in hard copy as well as electronic form (and much more not represented in this review) serves to highlight the dire necessity to help women engage in intimacy with God, within themselves, and with others so that the kingdom of God in this world might flourish.

CHAPTER 4

THESIS-PROJECT RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

What might inspire significance to a woman's spirit, mind, emotions, and body? Is there a material conduit which can help transport her into awakenings and embracing her own significance in these areas?

The materials of...human art may be bits of paint or steel or plaster, but they also are a rush of wings and feet of clay, inaudible cries and indecipherable longings; memories of people we have never known and souvenirs of places we have never been. They are suffering, panic, hope, space, wonder, restraint, hunger, disappointment, satisfaction, purity, texture, mystery, God. Art has the potential to hold matter and spirit in tension, and thereby to mirror human existence.¹

Since visual sacred art can be a wonderful reflection of God's expressed beauty in multi-layered realms, it can be used to summon the soul. Art of this kind can first function to hold up a mirror to the otherwise blind reality of a woman's inability to deeply receive love, and therefore deeply give love. Second, sacred visual art can also be a tool to reveal in more profound ways the intimacy of God's love for the woman. The tenuous triad of women, invisibility, and intimacy can be shored up to strengthen her core being, her soul, and her agency, her ability to contribute fully to life for God, herself, and others. The use of sacred art alongside an accompanying Scripture passage pondered in a contemplative setting can help her realize more of her own depth of being and be increasingly free to release that bounty to the world.

The *Visio Divina* project

Using a color print 8- x 11-inch copy of James Jacques Joseph Tissot's (1836-1902) watercolor, "What Christ Saw from the Cross,"² a copy of Mark 15:21-41 (The Message), and a

¹ Karen Stone, *Image and Spirit: Finding Meaning in Visual Art* (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg, 2003), 20.

² James Jacques Joseph Tissot, *What Christ Saw from the Cross*, 1886-94, Brooklyn Museum, <http://www.artbible.info/art/large/495.html>.

page of *Lectio Divina* instructions embedded within three contemplative questions developed by the writer, a *Visio Divina* packet³ was compiled for those willing to partake in this project.⁴

The print was chosen based on its unusual perspective of Christ looking down on the scene surrounding His crucifixion rather than the more traditional view of an outsider surveying the scene. The concentric circles of humanity surrounding Christ on the cross can invite the viewer of the print to identify with one of the people looking up at Christ. An obvious tomb entrance just left of the middle of the picture is a reminder of Christ's choice to face death for humanity. Men and women from a variety of social classes are depicted in the picture. The mother of Christ standing just beneath the feet of Jesus with a look of tragic horror and despair contrasts with some of the seemingly faceless people observing from the margins.

From the various gospel accounts of the crucifixion, the account in the Gospel of Mark seems to correlate the closest with the events portrayed in the picture. Using the contemporary language paraphrase of Eugene Peterson's *The Message: The Bible in Contemporary Language* helped make the language most accessible to all participants. Since the participants' social, cultural, and religious backgrounds were an unknown as the project was developed, it seemed wisest to choose the most relevant scriptural language available.

A description of how to engage in a *Lectio Divina*⁵ became part of the project as a didactic tool. The ancient practice of *Lectio Divina* is not well known to many people today. The

³ Appendix B.

⁴ Juliet Benner, *Contemplative Vision: A Guide to Art and Prayer* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2011). This project idea was conceived through the writer's profound interaction with this book.

⁵ "The first 1,500 years of church history were characterized by the practice of *lectio divina* (author's emphasis). Since many people were illiterate and many that could read didn't have Bibles, *lectio divina* offered a way of attending to Scripture as it was read in church, with an ear to hearing a word from God. Some brief and memorable word or phrase became bread for the soul throughout the week. Devotional reading is not an exercise in mentally critiquing or exegeting the text. It exists to further divine

hope was that, in offering a written description that one might preserve for future use,⁶ the participant might become curious and want to use this method of listening when reading other Scripture passages.

Using contemplative questions was an aid to help the participant integrate what they were seeing and hearing with their own lives. The questions could be considered a type of personal application of the experience. Offering the questions was to help the participant engage more deeply with what they were seeing and reading, as well as with their own reactions to the experience.

The writer was first invited to offer this project as a publicized event through a local independent spiritual formation center on a Saturday morning. On another Saturday morning, the writer was invited to offer this project at the beginning of a whole quiet day at a local Episcopal church. Since the congregation of the American Baptist church at which the writer is the pastor expressed desire for a special evening Lenten spiritual activity, this served as another venue for the project offering. The leadership of the annual women's retreat of a Presbyterian church in the United States of America located in Charlotte, North Carolina asked for the writer to present this offering during the Saturday morning of their three-day retreat focusing on the topic of building intimacy with Christ through one's daily devotions. The writer's Friday morning prayer group, made up of women from a variety of area churches, expressed interest in the project and wanted to participate. Doing the project became the content and focus of the morning of prayer.

companionship. *Lectio divina* invites us into God's presence to listen for his particular, loving word *to me* (author's emphasis) at this particular moment in time. In *lectio* one listens to the word as it is read aloud, or you read the text aloud for yourself." Adele Ahlberg Calhoun, *Spiritual Disciplines Handbook: Practices that Transform Us* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2005), 168.

⁶ Appendix A.

Ten women were surveyed in the first workshop, six in the writer's church during a Lenten offering, five women from a weekly Friday prayer gathering (in which the writer participates), eleven from a Quiet Day offered at a local Episcopal church, and thirty-one women from a women's retreat in North Carolina. About half of the sixty-three women surveyed participated in this *Visio Divina* exercise just preceding and during the Lenten season of 2014, which was an especially poignant time to consider this subject in regards to the church year. The other half did the *Visio Divina* a week after Easter in 2014 (the women in North Carolina). Though not part of the survey questions, it is estimated that the women who engaged with this experience ranged in age from twenty to eighty years of age.

Only women were surveyed in this workshop format, and each began and ended the session with a brief survey.⁷ After the women completed the initial survey, the writer gave a brief verbal history of the artist's life.⁸ The women were instructed to take an hour to sit in silence and contemplate the picture, Scripture passage, and contemplative questions. In most workshops, the song by Graham Kendrick, "I Kneel Down (On the Blood-Stained Ground)"⁹ was used to conclude the silence and transition into sharing insights from the participants. This time of group sharing lasted up to thirty minutes. Those in attendance were invited to share their observations with the group if they desired. Most people complied. The women were given a concluding survey to fill out,¹⁰ and the workshop was completed in a total of one and a half hours.

⁷ Appendix B.

⁸ Appendix A.

⁹ Graham Kendrick, "I Kneel Down (on the Blood Stained Ground)," *What Grace*, recorded July 27, 2001, Furious Records, iTunes.

¹⁰ Appendix B.

The Three Project Goals

The intent of this project was to receive insight as to whether women might be aided in unlocking their invisibility through a *Visio Divina* offering done in silence and given an hour's time of contemplation. It was hoped that women might be helped to experience more of the love of God for them personally, which would serve to increase their sense of intimacy with God. Another hope was for the women to receive any revelations of understanding about themselves from God (intimacy with self). Certainly, there was the hope that some women might experience some movement in breakthrough from invisibility. During the concluding time of sharing observations with others who participated in the same contemplative offering, the writer's hope was that women might have their own understanding expanded as they listened to what others received from the same activity (encouragement towards intimacy with others).

Because of the unique perspective offered by the artist, that of looking at the crowd through Jesus' eyes as He hung on the cross, the writer's first goal was to help the participant engage with the heart of God for humanity, and specifically for the participant. Christ, being fully God as well as fully human, did not have to stay on the cross and endure such torment but chose to do so out of love for the Father and love for humankind. Realizing this love which kept Christ on the cross for those He loved, even if they did not return His love, can put the participant in touch with both the depth of compassion and the love of Christ expressed for her. The first goal is to help the woman see herself uniquely as a recipient of the matchless love of God.

The second goal of this project was to help facilitate the participant's increased intimacy within herself. If Christ chose to endure the cross and death for her and loves her profoundly, any self-loathing or self-devaluation tendencies may surface as a result. Perhaps the participant might be confronted for the very first time with the dichotomy between God's love for her and

her own love or lack thereof for herself. If these tensions arise for the woman, she may begin to believe there is a reason to start accepting herself and even start valuing herself because of the priceless worth Christ puts on her.

Finally, as the participant listened to the insights of other women in the group, she may realize that some of her thoughts and feelings about the experience of the project are shared by the other participants. This, too, may serve to validate participants' feelings and thoughts and aid in their sharing of a common understanding. It may also give them courage to share their experiences further with others. The group participation at the close of the project was to help each woman increase her own understanding about herself and others who have shared a similar experience.

CHAPTER 5 OUTCOMES AND CONCLUSIONS

Can a *Visio Divina* project like the one put forth in chapter four be an effective way of helping women break through to greater intimacy with God, within themselves, and with others? The majority of comments given on the final survey¹ seem to strongly affirm this hypothesis. Many women indicated through a variety of experiences of having a breakthrough out of emotional and/or spiritual invisibility.

Women experienced an increased intimacy with God

One woman in the first workshop experienced major spiritual movement during her hour with God. Responding to the first “Follow-Up Survey” question, What about this workshop was helpful to you? she replied, “[I] arrived feeling distant from God [and] left feeling closer.” As she observed the artwork, she said that she initially identified with a figure that was far away from Christ in proximity. By the end, however, she identified with one of the women right in front of the cross. Interestingly, this particular woman shared that she was an artist by vocation.

Several women remarked that they were struck with the fact that, though God abandoned Jesus on the cross, they knew that God would not abandon them. In response, a woman wrote, “[This has been] a wonderful reminder that God is God, even when there is a sense of abandonment.” Another woman wrote, “[I am] so grateful that Jesus was obedient to God to the point of being abandoned by God so that I don’t have to be abandoned by God.” A different woman had the particular revelation during her time with God that “during difficult times, He has not forsaken me – I just don’t understand His plan yet.” God seemed to be reassuring some of God’s daughters through this offering that “...God has said, ‘Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you’” (Hebrews 13:5b).

¹ Appendix C.

While the majority of women expressed feeling more aware of the presence of God in their lives through practicing this *Visio Divina*, one remarked, "I never related artwork to Scripture and intend to do more. It helps me to feel more aware of God." From a separate survey, a woman had this realization, "He is in everything all the time, when I let Him show me." Since several women expressed the difficulty of being still for an hour, a few women said that the picture and Scripture helped them focus and not be as easily distracted as they might be sitting in silence. This experience helped them "focus on His always being there." One who settled into the silence confessed, "I do feel His presence when I'm silent – the art helps with intimacy." Another summed up her experience of God's presence by saying, "I loved the time to feel one with the Lord and [to] ask questions. He helped me feel calm and really in tune [with Him]." Having a sense of the presence of God helps pave a woman's way into greater intimacy with her Creator, Redeemer, and Sustainer.

A few of the women surveyed were surprisingly ushered into considering specific issues in their lives in the safety of God's presence. One of the women noted that "[the *Visio Divina*] made me take the time through observation to go step by step in an area that's been hurting and wounding and come out the other side believing He will give me the words, [and] the [courage] which brings freedom." In considering the women at the foot of the cross in the artwork, a different woman said that looking at them "helped bring additional insight from an accident she was in nine years previous (lying prostrate like the woman in the foreground), [and thinking that] emotional pain often accompanies physical pain [and that] resurrection follows." In the last workshop, one of the women expressed that the experience "opened my eyes to a difficult situation I have experienced. Now [I have] more understanding. [I have a] bigger awareness [of God]. This took some [of my] anger away." Another woman shared that she saw God's hand in her life in the past, and another that she could see how God has always been

answering her prayers. A solid sense of God's immediate presence was mediated through the women's willingness to engage with God in this way.

Two women became aware that they were not feeling a sense of intimacy with God. The first woman who identified as having walked with Christ for ten years said that, while she did not feel a close connection with God but rather a distance, she still knew "that He is there waiting for me." In answering the question about if she felt increased awareness of God's concern and love for her while participating, she wrote, "I don't feel it, [I] feel abandoned and wondering. Why [is] this process necessary to get closer to Him? Can't it just be easier?" The second woman's realization after doing this exercise came to the conclusion that she doesn't "have a close enough relationship with God." This woman had only been a Christian for six months. Even the clarity that one's relationship with God feels distant or not "close enough" can be a catalyst for further movement into the heart of God and seeking greater intimacy with God.

Women experienced an increased intimacy with themselves

What from this project began helping women unlock their own sense of invisibility? How did women process insight into themselves, helping them to know themselves more and reveal that to the writer? Being in silence for an hour was admittedly hard for many of the women. Several commented that it was the hardest thing about the exercise (and some would shorten the amount of time in silence), while others commented that they welcomed it (but would not necessarily choose that opportunity on their own). Another few spoke of the silence revealing to them how much they need to be silent and listen more. About the silence, one woman who said it was the most difficult thing about participating in the *Visio Divina* revealed, "I've become so dependent on having another's opinion before forming mine." Sitting in silence made this woman face her own thoughts and think for herself rather than have another

influence or determine her opinion. The experience of silence seemed to expose this truth to this woman.

While observing the artwork a woman commented that “the expressions on the faces reminded me of myself at times – doubt – fear – uncertain about what was going on.” A wonderful insight to self-understanding was shared by another woman saying, “I need to own it [God’s concern and love for me].” One woman in particular spoke about the *Lectio Divina* process (hearing the Scripture read three times, slowly, with silence in between) and what God unfolded to her in then switching to looking at the artwork: “As I listened to the Scripture, my heart longed to see Jesus as I was following Him in the Scripture – but then I needed to switch perspective to what Jesus sees...in me [through the artwork]. This was a good leap!” Another delightful survey response came when a woman, answering what was most helpful to her about doing the project, wrote, “This [workshop] encouraged me to begin writing poetry again.”

Perhaps the most poignant comment about unlocking invisibility came from one who shared that “God spoke to me through the account of Simon and reminded me that I, too, was brought from the outside into the midst of His presence.” Other similar comments included a woman who said she was unaware of the strength of God’s love for her, and another who replied that she might begin to take time to share the Scripture with her husband (she noted that she had been a Christian for fifteen years). Could this woman have been seeking to step out of her own spiritual invisibility with her husband in wanting to share Scripture with him after so many years? A woman from the first workshop commented that “my judging things distances me from them, [and] puts up a barrier.” This same woman realized that her own feeling of distance from God was about her moving away from God, not God moving away from her. Was this woman’s self-discovery about putting up a barrier when she judges things actually her way of expressing a realization that she wanted to be more invisible (distant) to God, to stay hidden

from God, herself, and others? Perhaps she was beginning to see that her judging kept her at a self-determined distance from God, herself, and others, establishing her own sense of safety through invisibility? It often takes a collection of such insights to help a woman embrace the courage to move out of invisibility with greater consistency and confidence. God is ready and waiting to reflect back to women the real state of their souls and compel them to step out into the light of their true selves.

Women were encouraged by sharing with and listening to others

The writer was clear in each workshop that sharing during the group time immediately following the silent contemplative time was voluntary, not expected. Only a couple of women wrote that they were glad not to have to share (as in going around in a circle) and were apprehensive about that in the beginning. Several women commented on the helpfulness of learning from others' insights. One woman wrote, "I love how God touched the people in the group in so many ways and met them where they were." Another wrote that "unity in the Spirit was apparent" [through hearing others' reflections]. Finally as others spoke about their experience with the painting, a woman said that she "saw a different perspective of the cross and it made me feel differently about what Jesus has done." This aspect of the project was not as deeply insightful as those revelations of increased intimacy with God and one's self, but it still put forth some clues and showed that women benefitted by sharing along with others about their insights.

What steps would have improved the effectiveness of the project procedure?

The final survey of the *Visio Divina* solicited ways that the project/experience might have been more helpful. Only a few women thought it would have been more helpful to have the artist's picture projected on a screen in a large room rather than having a personal copy to ponder. One reason that this may have been requested is that the writer had a difficult time

achieving crisp, clear, color copies of the artwork. Due to particular printer parameters, some copies came out darker and not very sharp. The writer diligently sought to filter through and discard any blatantly skewed copies to maximize each woman's experience.

One woman suggested that the option for silence throughout be offered for those seeking a more comprehensive time of silence. Two women said that they had difficulty discerning the connection between the *Visio Divina* offering and application to themselves. Another woman said that the picture brought her too much sadness, so she was unable to focus on it and open up her mind to it.

Project Summary

From the information gathered, it seems apparent that a contemplative exercise combining sacred art that depicts a particular passage of Scripture and accompanying personal questions to ponder helps draw women into a greater sense of God's presence and their own self-awareness. Granted, the women surveyed for this project all claimed to be Christians, which makes this research quite specific. This thesis project is but one way to entice women out of invisibility into increasing intimacy with God, within themselves, and with others.

Suggested Future Research

What future research could be done to help strengthen a woman's sense of intimacy with God, within herself, and with others? Are there different spiritual disciplines which could be engaged, besides *Lectio Divina* and *Visio Divina*, which might aid in helping a woman become aware of her sense of invisibility and awaken her desire for increased intimacy? How might continued research convince a woman that within her person is a deep well waiting to be continually filled by God and poured out upon her own life and others' lives?

A longer-term research project to further explore this topic could be conducted using The Spiritual Exercises of Saint Ignatius² (either offered daily for a month or over a nine-month timeline). This discipline was developed in the sixteenth century by Saint Ignatius for the purpose of exposing a person to both daily Scripture reading and meditation for a certain time period each day (with the high priority of engaging the participant's imagination), then praying for a specified grace each day of the particular week, and journaling daily about one's experience with God in prayer. Also included in this discipline are daily/monthly (the time period is dependent on the specific annotation of the exercises offered) individual meetings with a spiritual director, daily/monthly meetings in group direction with others engaged in the exercises, and day retreats taken weekly/quarterly to learn about movements of the soul (e.g., consolation or desolation). While the exercises are not gender exclusive, one could observe and survey only the women within a group during the particular time frame to learn about how each one's personal awareness and sense of intimacy grows through the use of this spiritual discipline.

It would be quite interesting to research a group of women who are willing to grow in intimacy with God, within themselves, and with others by offering a cross-section of spiritual disciplines over a set period of time (e.g., six months offering one or two disciplines a month), making sure that there were a variety of disciplines experienced, particularly in regards to targeting different learning styles (e.g., kinesthetic learners, visual learners, etc.). Since many women struggle with being silent and sitting in silence for even an hour, offering a variety of spiritual disciplines targeting different learning styles might have greater impact individually and collectively.

² Kevin O'Brien, SJ, *The Ignatian Adventure: Experiencing the Spiritual Exercises of Saint Ignatius in Daily Life* (Chicago, IL: Loyola Press, 2011).

Conducting a survey of women about what they perceive as their greatest daily obstacles to increased intimacy with God, within themselves, and with others, then pinpointing specific obstacles and developing some beginning strategies to help women start to feel success could serve to help women gain awareness and a desire for more intimacy. Introducing the possibility of a new and life-giving pattern in women's lives through small, incremental steps is often the key to prolonged change and greater health. Life coaches and spiritual directors could be utilized to track with women personally throughout the agreed-upon time period in order to optimize the women's experience and growth.

Other broader questions to consider for further research would be: What might help a woman recognize and emerge out of her own invisibility in her life? How does a particular church culture promote a woman's invisibility and prohibit her from thriving in deeper intimacy with God, within herself, and with others? What retreats or series of teachings might be developed and offered in a church to help both men and women recognize and address the issue of women's growth in intimacy being stunted because of the invasiveness of patriarchy in society and the church? Might an effective assessment tool be created to help people in a specific local church setting evaluate their own sense of health and growth in intimacy beyond what they experience in their local culture? How might a culture of transparent storytelling be created in and supported by a church in order to highlight each person's struggles with invisibility and intimacy? The latter two questions for research might begin with considering women first, but both men and women would benefit from this research by using it for themselves, as well as in supporting the *shalom* of the opposite gender.

Conclusion

Ultimately, helping women confront experiences of invisibility is key to helping them unlock their hearts, minds, emotions, and spirits to deeper experiences of intimacy with God,

within themselves, and with others. Pursuing a life of increasing intimacy requires deep vulnerability and huge risk. Since intimacy is at the very center of the relationship of the Triune God, so it is at the very center of women's relationships and thriving in this world and in the kingdom of God. Satan, the archenemy of God and God's people, wants to destroy intimacy because the knowledge and experience of it unites humanity with God and God's people (including self) and produces further the life of the Triune God. *Even Satan's first interaction with humanity in the Garden of Eden resulted in humanity's seeking invisibility. After engaging in rebellion against God for the first time, both the man and the woman then hid from God and sought to cover up their bodies from one another.* Intimacy between humans and God, humans within themselves, and humans towards one another would have been forever broken, but for God's salvific intervention through Christ. Likewise, Christ's death immediately caused the curtain in the temple to be rent in two, inviting Christ followers into the most holy place signifying the eternal presence of God. Christ's indwelling each believer compels the believer to partner with the Triune God and proclaim the most excellent news of intimacy restored and unending. Akin to the progressive revelation of God found throughout the pages of Scripture, the outworking of this restoration on earth is not smooth or linear in daily life. It is, however, the crowning glory of both God and humankind.

This world is no friend to grace. Seeking for intimacy at any level—with God or with people—isn't a venture that gets much support. Intimacy isn't good for business. It is inefficient, it lacks 'glamour.' If love of God can be reduced to a ritualized hour of worship, if love of another can be reduced to an act of sexual intercourse, then routines are simple and the world can be run efficiently. But if we won't settle for the reduction of love to lust or of faith to ritual, and we run through the streets asking for more, we will most certainly disturb the peace and be told to behave ourselves and go back to our homes and churches where we belong. Intimacy is not easy achievement. There is pain, longing, disappointment, and hurt. But if the costs are considerable, the rewards are even more considerable. For in relationship with another person—and with the God

who loves us—we complete the humanity for which we were created. And we learn to love even as we are loved, fully, faithfully, and forever.³

³ Eugene H. Peterson, *Conversations: The Message with Its Translator* (Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress, 2007), 1,017.

APPENDIX A
***VISIO DIVINA* “WHAT CHRIST SAW FROM THE CROSS”**

Brief history of artist, James Jacques Joseph Tissot ([Tate.org, uk/art/artists/james Tissot](http://Tate.org.uk/art/artists/james%20Tissot))

Painter of “What Christ Saw from the Cross”

Painter, illustrator, etcher

1836 - 1902

Raised by father who was a devout Roman Catholic, educated by Jesuits.

1853 - Studied at School of Fine Arts, Paris; friendly with Whistler and Degas.

Painted scenes of contemporary life and fashionable women.

Influenced by Manet and Alfred Stevens.

Considered to be an artist on the fringe of impressionism.

1871 – Fled to London after taking part in the Commune (military exploit) in the defense of Paris (Franco-Prussian War).

Exhibited at The Royal Academy and The Grosvenor Gallery in London – Tissot’s paintings of Thames River were influenced by Whistler’s paintings.

Tissot enjoyed success as an artist in his era.

1876 – Met divorcee Kathleen Newton, who was often his model and lived with her until her death by suicide (she was afflicted with tuberculosis) in 1882.

At some point, Tissot had a profound encounter with God after Kathleen’s death. In the late 1880s, he spent over three years visiting Palestine to study the landscape, topography, and people. He devoted the rest of his life to painting biblical scenes, particularly “The Life of Christ” series completed in 1896. “What Christ Saw from the Cross” was part of Tissot’s “The Life of Christ” series.

1902 – Tissot died as a religious recluse.

Early 1900s – “The Life of Christ” was purchased and exhibited by the Brooklyn Museum where it is still housed today.

Mark 15:21-41 The Message

²¹ There was a man walking by, coming from work, Simon from Cyrene, the father of Alexander and Rufus. They made him carry Jesus' cross.

²²⁻²⁴ The soldiers brought Jesus to Golgotha, meaning "Skull Hill." They offered him a mild painkiller (wine mixed with myrrh), but he wouldn't take it. And they nailed him to the cross. They divided up his clothes and threw dice to see who would get them.

²⁵⁻³⁰ They nailed him up at nine o'clock in the morning. The charge against him—THE KING OF THE JEWS—was printed on a poster. Along with him, they crucified two criminals, one to his right, the other to his left. People passing along the road jeered, shaking their heads in mock lament: "You bragged that you could tear down the Temple and then rebuild it in three days—so show us your stuff! Save yourself! If you're really God's Son, come down from that cross!"

³¹⁻³² The high priests, along with the religion scholars, were right there mixing it up with the rest of them, having a great time poking fun at him: "He saved others—but he can't save himself! Messiah, is he? King of Israel? Then let him climb down from that cross. We'll all become believers then!" Even the men crucified alongside him joined in the mockery.

³³⁻³⁴ At noon the sky became extremely dark. The darkness lasted three hours. At three o'clock, Jesus groaned out of the depths, crying loudly, "Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani?" which means, "My God, my God, why have you abandoned me?"

³⁵⁻³⁶ Some of the bystanders who heard him said, "Listen, he's calling for Elijah." Someone ran off, soaked a sponge in sour wine, put it on a stick, and gave it to him to drink, saying, "Let's see if Elijah comes to take him down."

³⁷⁻³⁹ But Jesus, with a loud cry, gave his last breath. At that moment the Temple curtain ripped right down the middle. When the Roman captain standing guard in front of him saw that he had quit breathing, he said, "This has to be the Son of God!"

⁴⁰⁻⁴¹ There were women watching from a distance, among them Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of the younger James and Joses, and Salome. When Jesus was in Galilee, these women followed and served him, and had come up with him to Jerusalem.



https://images.search.yahoo.com/search/images?p=What+Christ+Saw+from+the+Cross+Tissot&fr=mcafee&imgurl=http%3A%2F%2Fwww.jesuswalk.com%2F7-last-words%2Fimages%2Ftissot-what-our-savior-saw-from-the-cross-300x287x72.jpg#id=0&iurl=http%3A%2F%2Ftruthbook.com%2Fimages%2Fsite_images%2FJames_Tissot_What_Our_Saviour_Saw_from_the_Cross_525.jpg&action=click

Guided Meditation for Contemplative Gaze Workshop

1. Upon your initial encounter with the artwork, is there anything that strikes you, draws you in towards, delights you, or annoys you about the piece?
2. As you take time to observe the artwork and gaze upon it, what are you noticing about it?
3. Read the selected Scripture passage in the following way (We are using an ancient way called "*Lectio Divina*" or "Sacred Reading" of allowing Scripture to speak directly to you. This will involve four readings of the same Scripture passage interspersed with silent reflection):
 - a. Read the passage slowly, letting the words, in effect, wash over you.
 - b. Take a moment to be silent, and "sit with" the artwork and the words.
 - c. Read the passage again, slowly, and notice any word, phrase, thought, or "mind picture" that stands out to you. Don't analyze why this stands out to you, just receive it. If you struggle with knowing what stands out to you, here are some ways to know: it may strike you differently from the other words when read (popping out at you); it may have a "shimmering" kind of quality when you read it; it may immediately resonate with your heart; it may prompt a question in you.
 - d. Take another moment to be silent, this time holding before the Lord that which stood out to you from the passage. If it helps you, place your hands on your lap palms up, and "hold" this word/phrase/thought/mind picture before the Lord. Sit in silence, seeking to be aware of God's Presence with you while also gazing at the artwork. If it helps you to focus, write down what thoughts are coming to you and what you are noticing.
 - e. Read the passage slowly once more. After reading, ask the Lord what it is about this word/phrase/thought/mind picture that the Lord is seeking to reveal to you/say to you/speak to your heart. Gaze at the artwork as you desire. Be patient with God and yourself. This is not a competition. If nothing comes right away, just enjoy staying present with the Lord, the passage, and the artwork. Relax and linger. Jot down your thoughts and impressions, if you so desire.
 - f. Read the passage one final time, as though leaning in to listen to God's Voice closely.
 - g. Ask the Lord if there is a prayer that the Lord is bubbling up in you through the awareness that you have.
 - h. Respond back to God in prayer however you feel led.
4. As you let the visual artwork and the written word integrate in your soul, what are you noticing about God, yourself, creation, another? Is there a particular situation in your life to which God is speaking through this experience? What longings or desires are rising up in you? How might God want to grant you deeper understanding of this situation, yourself, others, or of God?

APPENDIX B
SURVEY QUESTIONNAIRES FOR *VISIO DIVINA*

Your Code _____ (last four digits of your phone number)
Only to be used to match beginning and ending surveys.

Initial Survey for Contemplative Gaze Workshop

1. Is this your first time to a Contemplative Gaze Workshop?
2. What about this workshop caused you to want to participate?
3. Are you a Christ-follower? If so, approximately how long have you been growing in your relationship with Christ?
4. Have you ever used the combination of sacred art and Scripture before to help you draw closer to God?
If so, what was that experience like for you?
5. What are you hoping to receive from this Contemplative Gaze Workshop?
6. Do you have any reservations about participating in this workshop?
If so, what are they?

Your Code _____ (last four digits of your phone number)
Only to be used to match beginning and ending surveys.

Follow Up Survey for Contemplative Gaze Workshop

1. What about this workshop was helpful to you?
2. What about this workshop was difficult for you?
3. In what ways would you describe being helped by the workshop? Please describe the workshop's effects on ...
 - a. Your experience of the Presence of God in your life.
 - b. Your awareness of God's concern and love for you.
 - c. Broadening your understanding of God, yourself, another, or a specific situation in your life.
4. Was gazing on the artwork while contemplating Scripture and sitting in silence illuminating to you?
Do you feel that it added a new dimension to your insight into God, Scripture, and/or your life?
If "yes", please explain.
5. Would you change anything about the workshop?

If you are interested in receiving further information on the research for which this project contributes, please leave your email address here:

APPENDIX C

SYMBOLS IMPART MEANING TO HUMANITY

Since men and women are embodied souls and spirits, translating meaning and understanding from the spirit to the material/physical and back again can present stubborn obstacles. The mature human being, one who lives into increasing *shalom*, is an individual who is experiencing greater integration of body, mind, soul, and spirit.

...the embodiment of spirit in matter and the tension between the material and the transcendent [is what] characterizes human life. There is a danger in tending half of one's nature, whether physical or spiritual, to the neglect of the other half. Meaningful symbols are needed that involve us as integral physical and spiritual beings, and that enable us to reenact meaning in our own lives.¹

Humanity seeks meaning and imparts meaning symbolically. Symbols can become expressions to humans of the multifaceted reality of a body, mind, soul, and spirit connection. Humans often impart and imbibe beauty as well as meaning through symbols.

Beauty is a tool to encourage personal revelation (being seen—no longer invisible)

How might beauty, specifically artistic renditions of biblical truths, help unlock and unleash a woman from her false self (reactive self) into her true self (receptive self)²? Could

¹ Karen Stone, *Image and Spirit: Finding Meaning in Visual Art* (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg, 2003), 19.

² "Trust offers an open, receptive soul that is able to give oneself and receive the presence of another in a free, responsible and loving way. Mistrust leads to a closed, reactive soul that is unavailable to another in *both* detached *and* enmeshed ways. A receptive way of relating is the result of early relational connections in which a child felt safe, secure and deeply loved. It is marked by a willingness to be present to others as they are without exaggerated evaluation, judgment or protection. The receptive person does not agree with everything others do, because suspending all judgment is clearly unwise. But the receptive person has an empathetic curiosity by which he or she engages and explores relationships without feeling overly ashamed, anxious or guilty. By contrast, a reactive way of relating is overly anxious, fearful, suspicious, sad or angry. It is the result of early relational connections in which the child felt ignored, dismissed, rejected and inferior. Reactivity is the energy underneath the fight, flight or freeze reactions in relationships. Sometimes we fight by clinging to another with unrealistic and overly dependent demands. Sometimes we literally walk away, refusing to relationally engage when conflicts arise. And sometimes we don't walk away but are frozen, emotionally shut down, and give the silent treatment to others. Reactivity ultimately owes its existence to mistrust. ...Our early history does indeed shape the soul to be

God's creation of beauty through Spirit-inspired artistic expression be a key to helping her see and receive all of her own exquisite value as a created masterpiece herself? Beauty as depicted in art can encourage the invisible woman to be revealed and free her to build healthy intimacy in relationships.

In a sermon entitled "It's OK Not to Be Ok: Two Theaters," John Ortberg presents a definition of beauty and compares it with the sublime: "There is an old distinction between beauty and the sublime. Beauty is the goodness we can see and enjoy and understand. The sublime is transcendent. It evokes mystery and wonder and awe and worship because it points to another world where everything is the way that it is supposed to be. Beauty is the rainbow. The sublime is somewhere over the rainbow...."³ In the created world, there is an infinite variety of beauty to be seen both at a macro and micro level. This visible beauty to the human eye is made to both sustain life on this planet and to help humanity thrive.

Beauty can serve as a mirror to the human soul. Since humans are, at their best, co-creators with God on the earthly realm, visual art can also be used to serve as a mirror to the human soul. "When an artist pursues the beautiful, he or she opens a channel of revelation between God and humanity. It's an extension of the revelation that occurs through the beauty of creation, about which St. Paul claimed, 'For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes, His eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly seen, being understood

fundamentally open or closed to relational engagement. We all have our particular setting in light of what we have lived...." Plass and Cofield, *The Relational Soul*, 33-34.

³ John Ortberg, "It's OK Not to be OK: A Theater with Two Stages," (video of sermon, Menlo.Church, Menlo Park, California, September 17-18, 2016), accessed January 6, 2017, <https://menlo.church/series/its-ok-not-to-be-ok#/modal/message/1130/mlo>.

through what has been made' (Rom. 1:20 NASB)."⁴ In her chapter, "The Artist: What Exactly is an Artist and How do we Shepherd Them?,"⁵ Barbara Nicolosi refers to how Thomas Aquinas defined beauty as, "wholeness, harmony, and radiance."⁶ Nicolosi explains these three as:

Wholeness means nothing is missing. All parts are present, suggesting completeness. ...[also] there is nothing extra, nothing gratuitous.... So the beautiful gives us a sense of peace. Harmony means that all of those parts that are present are related to one another in a complementary relationship. Every part brings out the best in all of the other parts, and there is no domination or submission. And what do we get from harmony? When we experience harmony, we feel a sense of joy, because we are created to dwell in community. We were made by a Triune God whose nature is communitarian, and our destiny is to dwell with him one day in a perfect unity in which every being's full perfection will be manifest. ...Finally, there's radiance. When we experience a beautiful object, it communicates something profound to us, some kind of moral, spiritual, or intellectual enlightenment... reveal[ing] to us our unique dignity as a human person...it call[s] to you personally.⁷

Continuing with that thought of beauty "calling to you personally," Nicolosi refers to Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger, Pope Benedict XVI, and his reflection on this. "One of the ways you know you have encountered the beautiful is that it feels like personal communication. He notes that the word beauty comes from the Greek word *kalen*, meaning 'call,' because in the moment of the experience of beauty we feel that the revelation has our name stamped on it."⁸

To synthesize this explanation of beauty based on Aquinas, Nicolosi states,

In summary, the beautiful gives us a sense of rest, of joy, and of destiny. ...An experience of the beautiful always involves a paradoxical mix of humility and euphoria. It makes us feel humble because we have the sense that we have stumbled on something completely separate from us, something that existed before us and will go on without us. [And] we feel a surge of happiness that we have been personally chosen to be a

⁴ W. David O. Taylor, Ed. *For the Beauty of the Church: Casting a Vision for the Arts* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2010), 106.

⁵ Taylor, *For the Beauty of the Church*, 103.

⁶ Taylor, *For the Beauty of the Church*, 106.

⁷ Taylor, *For the Beauty of the Church*, 106, 107, 108.

⁸ Taylor, *For the Beauty of the Church*, 108.

witness to the beautiful thing. ...This actually subverts the problem of the Garden of Eden. Satan's temptation was, 'You shall be like gods.' Adam and Eve rejected their creaturehood. And this is the perennial temptation for us: we want to be like God, we want no limits. But the beautiful makes us content in our creaturehood: 'I'm small, and that's okay.'⁹

Pope John Paul II wrote about the artist as priest. A priest mediates God to humanity and humanity to God. There are several ways that the artist can function as priest to humanity, and according to John Paul II, one of those roles is as prophet. "[The artist] make[s] a response to God from us and God gives a gift of revelation back through them. It's as though the artist becomes God's reed to blow beautiful music through."¹⁰

The beauty of sacred art can enhance the understanding of Scripture

Laying the beauty of the actual word of God through the Bible alongside a representative artistic visual of that written word can be a way for the Holy Spirit dwelling within the Christ follower to deepen the understanding and experience of God's word to the believer. The visual art can help the believer engaging the art piece and Scripture passage to first of all, begin to slow down and be quiet, to enter a more contemplative space. Entering into the artistic expression may raise up an otherwise buried level of attentiveness to what is being put forth through the word. Art and the Bible in combination will probably raise new questions in the Christian about the meaning of the passage. It is often much easier for a human being to be able to imagine a scenario presented in the pages of Scripture with the help of a visual aid. Even if the visual is not particularly pleasing to the observer at first, if the observer stays with the word and her imagination and notices what is coming up for her in her contemplation, the Spirit of God may use even the dissonance to eventually bring about deeper understanding. This all

⁹ Taylor, *For the Beauty of the Church*, 108-109.

¹⁰ Taylor, *For the Beauty of the Church*, 113.

can be a wonderful gateway into even deeper intimacy with the Triune God. Using word and art to promote contemplative prayer practices is powerful.

While [contemplative prayer] can involve reading Scriptures [and artistic expressions of the biblical word], when this forms part of contemplative prayer we do not read primarily to get something or other from the passage, but simply as a way of being with God in openness and attentiveness. This openness and attentiveness is inner solitude and silence – a posture of quietly listening to God, being with God and responding to God’s invitations to intimacy. Regular practice of this type of prayer is not merely a discipline but is a way of moving prayer from the closet to the rest of our life. As our relationship with God deepens, we find that every aspect of our life is touched and transformed, and we begin to see as God sees and respond as God would respond.¹¹

Benner quotes John Drury, dean of Christ Church Cathedral in Oxford, as saying that “works of art...’[place] us in the realm of prayer, with its passive expectancy, its active openness’.”¹² Because of how sin has affected a human’s ability to receive this grace, to access this grace, Christ followers often struggle with intellectual knowledge of this grace versus deep heart understanding of how one is to live into the actuality of this grace. A Christian woman who has been oppressed through teaching and expectations (patriarchal in particular) placed on her from her culture, her family, and her church is often found at the crossroads of intellectual biblical understanding and experiential knowing, not even realizing that she is not truly experiencing the freedom of the grace of God.

God wants to meet us in heart and mind, body and soul, senses and imagination. Our experience of the divine is tremendously limited when we engage with Scriptures merely by means of intellectual understanding and belief. Christian art provides a way of opening ourselves in our depths and totality to an encounter with God. By learning how to engage biblical stories with the totality of our being, the Word gains access to the deep places within us that cannot be reached by words or reason alone. It opens us to the mystery of that which cannot be reduced to thoughts or beliefs. It helps us love God with all of our heart, all of our mind, all of our soul and all of our strength.¹³

¹¹ Juliet Benner, *Contemplative Vision: A Guide to Art and Prayer* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2011), 12.

¹² Benner, *Contemplative Vision*, 19.

¹³ Benner, *Contemplative Vision*, 16.

Visio Divina, a spiritual discipline which builds on the discipline of *Lectio Divina*, combines a short Scripture passage, sacred art expressing something about that same passage, along with coordinating contemplative questions. This spiritual practice can help bridge the often-unimagined distance between a person's head knowledge and heart understanding.

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VITA

The Reverend Laurel Griffith Coolbaugh is a native of Wilkes Barre, Pennsylvania (born August 6, 1960) and, for the first twelve years of her life, lived in various places in the eastern part of the state with the exception of a two-year interlude to Illinois. With a move to southern Connecticut, she attended and graduated from Staples High School in Westport. For her undergraduate degree, Laurel went first to the University of Vermont for a degree in music. After three years, she transferred to Wellesley College where she graduated with a Bachelors of Arts in music, *cum laude*, in 1983. Laurel's work as a vocalist in both professional and amateur settings has involved both solo and choral singing, mostly in churches and local chorales. In the late 1980s, she tried her hand at image consulting, establishing her own business, which lasted for many years. With a growing and continuing love for God and His word since her teenage years, Laurel became involved in various church ministries, from administration, working with children, leading small groups, speaking for groups and leading worship, to discipling youth. In her mid-forties, Laurel was called into seminary for pastoral ministry training. She graduated in 2008 with her Masters of Divinity from Gordon-Conwell Seminary in South Hamilton, Massachusetts. An area of special study during her seminary years and beyond has been spiritual formation and spiritual direction. In 2009, Laurel earned her certificate as a trained spiritual director from the Selah School of Spiritual Direction, a part of Leadership Transformations, Inc., also out of South Hamilton, Massachusetts. A member of Evangelical Spiritual Directors Network (ESDN), Laurel offers individual spiritual direction to several directees throughout New England, and has experience leading group spiritual direction and retreats. Laurel is currently enrolled in a Doctor of Ministry program, Effective Ministry to Women, with the projected graduation date of May 2018. While a doctoral candidate, she has developed a project on *Visio Divina*, combining the arts with *Lectio Divina* to help people lean in and listen to God's voice drawing them into deeper intimacy with the Community of the Triune God. Eugene Peterson's model of Pastor as Preacher and Spiritual Director is integral to who Laurel feels God is calling her to be in service of God's kingdom. Prior to taking the pastorate at Woodville Baptist Church in Hopkinton, Massachusetts in 2009 (the name changed to The Sanctuary at Woodville in 2017, Laurel served as Pastor of Worship and Spiritual Formation at Redeemer Community Church in Wellesley, Massachusetts, (currently Highrock Church in Needham, MA) as well as administrative assistant to the co-pastors, and Director of Children's Ministries. In the fall of 2014, Laurel and Bill started a new initiative, a Christian spiritual formation and retreat center called The Sanctuary at Woodville, at their current church. Laurel is graced to be married for thirty-six years to Bill Coolbaugh, Director of the Boston International Students' Ministry under Emmanuel Gospel Center's Multiethnic Ministries. Together they have a wonderful twenty-six-year-old son, Gethin Coolbaugh, who is a multi-platform sports' journalist.